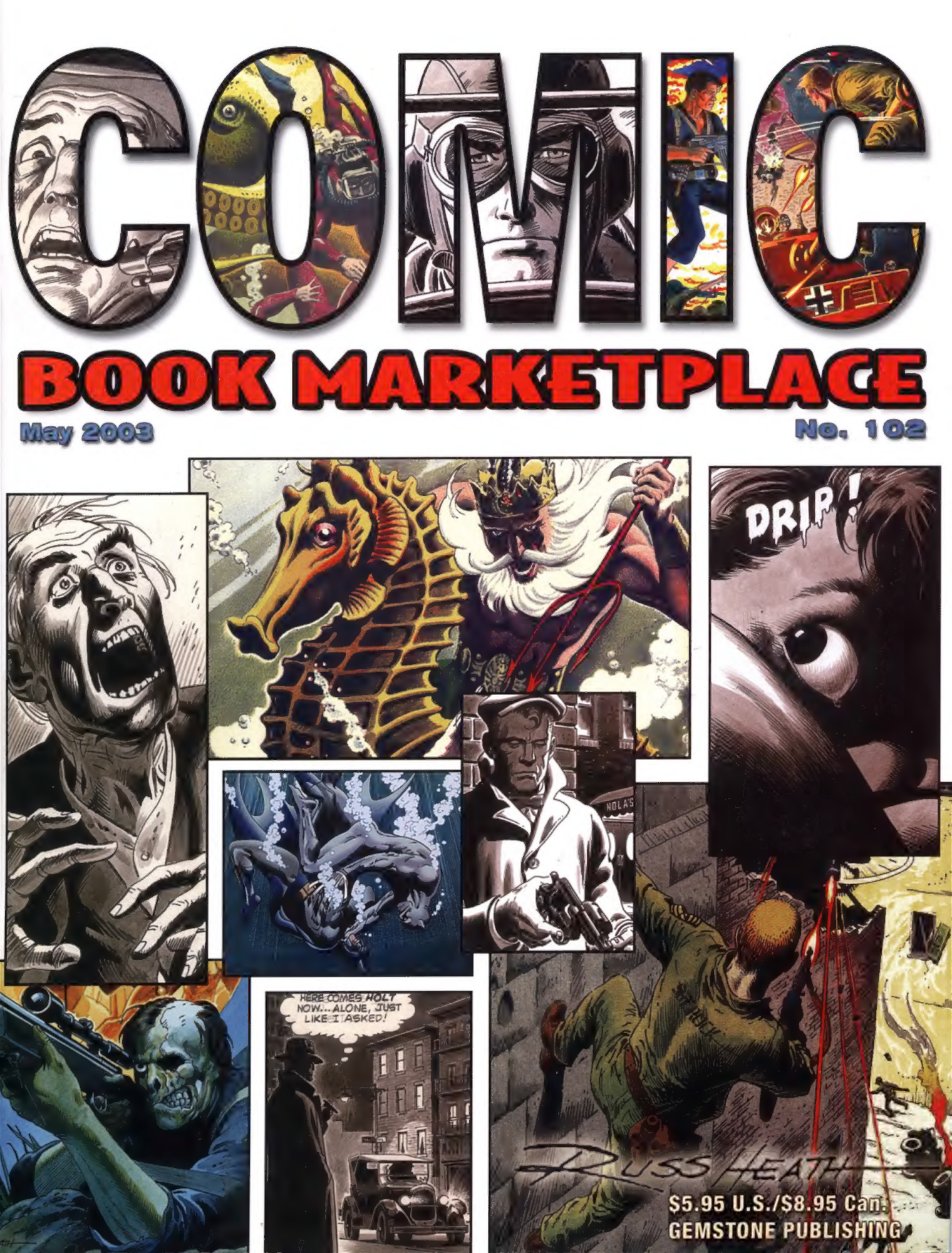
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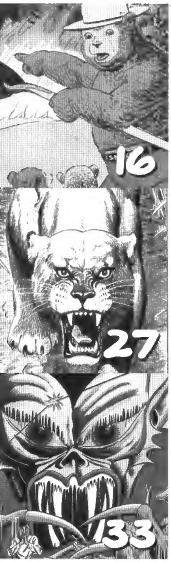

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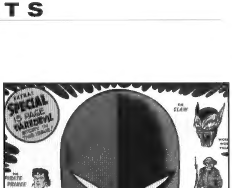

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The title and the lurid illustration on the cover grab your eye on the newsstand. There is a man, sweating heavily, strapped into a chair with his arms tied to the arms of the chair. Someone is driving wooden splinters under his fingernails to make him "squeal."

Crime Does Not Pay! appeared suddenly in 1942 amidst a veritable flock of superheroes in tights, and was important for a number of reasons: it was the first comic book devoted to true tales of criminals, with vivid depictions of their crimes. The stories were told boldly, explicitly, and the cover art by editor Charles Biro may not have been pretty, but it stood out on the newsstand against a sea of look-alike comic books.

Here were names and places you recognized—John Dillinger, Chicago, "Legs" Diamond, "Scarface" Al Capone—here they were in all their glory. Here were gangs of tough city kids, involved in petty crimes and hating the "cops." Maybe it was a comic book aimed at boys in the big cities, but I can tell you from experience that boys in small Missouri towns enjoyed these different and exciting comics.

Crime Does Not Pay!, *Boy Comics* and *Daredevil Comics* were the "big three" of Lev Gleason Publications. After the end of WW II in 1945, as the superhero comics started to fade in popularity, Lev Gleason's three titles soared, and during the late 1940s and into the early 1950s they were the best selling comic books in the country. As the superhero genre faltered, comic book publishers started turning to other successful genres, and soon there was a flood of crime comics from all the major publishers. But Lev Gleason, the publisher, and his two main men, editor and artist Charles Biro and artist Bob Wood, were there first and laid the foundation for all the crime comics which followed.

So in this issue we take a look at Gleason and his publishing empire, his groundbreaking "big three" comic books, and the lives of Biro and Wood. Bob Wood had an especially gruesome ending to his story, and New Yorker regular Art Spiegleman is currently writing a Broadway musical based on the his life. I can't wait to see it! I don't think people will be leaving the theatre whistling a happy tune after seeing this one!

Russ Cochran
Editor and Publisher

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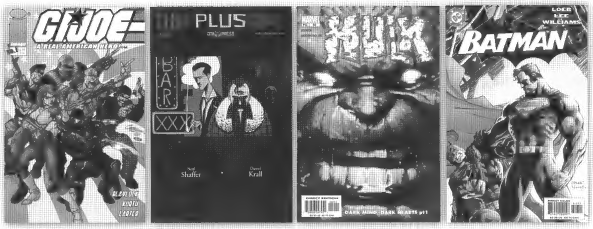

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Marketplace Mail

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Quality

Congratulations to you and your staff on the publication of *Comic Book Marketplace* #98. I haven't enjoyed an issue as much since the all-EC issue (#80).

Special compliments go to Michelle Nolan for her western anthologies article; she presented a great amount of information with which I was unfamiliar. Thanks!

The articles on Graham Ingels and The Two-Gun Kid were also very interesting. Likewise, the interview with John Severin.

Lastly, I appreciated reading the comments on Ernie Gerber. I agree with many others—Mr. Gerber truly did this hobby a great service through the production of the *Photo-Journal* books. I hope that somewhere down the road some collectors/dealers will take up the gauntlet and finish the DC books. It would be a wonderful tribute to Mr. Gerber.

Russ, thanks again to you and your staff for *CBM* #98. I hope the following issues are of the same quality!

Ron Ballard
Elko, NV

And we hope that they are of even higher quality!

RC

Passed your eyes

I am a customer of Gemstone since it was Russ Cochran, Publisher. It is not easy to write for me, especially in English, but I feel compelled to do it because I would like to congratulate you for the three gems of *CBM* dedicated to the *big three*. It has been delightful to read the articles and to see the selected strips, some of them never seen before.

Also, it is a pleasure to observe that you have incorporated Dr. Alberto Becattini into the excellent group of collaborators of *CBM*. I have followed Dr. Becattini for several years and he is one of the best experts in Disney (another *CBM* hit) and comics of Europe and, in my opinion, the world over.

I suggest to continue with the idea of introducing, from time to time, some other greats of the comics strip field, like the late Stan Drake, Leonard Starr, Ken Bald, J. Cullen Murphy, the controversial J. Celardo, etc., without forgetting such luminaries of the comic book like Bob Oksner, Bob Brown, Bruno Premiani, etc....

I know that this is very difficult to do, because the current readers prefer other pasturages, but I should be most grateful if you could do something.

Please, keep in mind that whatever your decision, I'll continue buying and reading *CBM*!

Jaime Echevarria
Spain

Jaime, only some of our readers prefer those other "pasturages." We actually receive more letters encouraging us to continue the "field trips" into other areas of collecting. The readers who write that we should just stick to comic books only are definitely in the minority—but it's a vocal minority! And we are proud as punch to feature articles by Dr. Beccatini in CBM*—watch for his Disney article coming up in #103. My favorite part of your letter is the last line! That's the kind of loyal readership we need in order to grow and prosper.*

RC

Spread out!

I don't have any pictures of me as a child dressed up like my favorite cowboy, but I do have a photo of me and the Three Stooges.

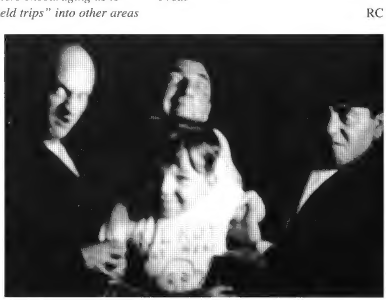
I must have been about 14, and they came through Richmond as a part of a stage show. A cameraman was there who promised to take a photo and for 75 cents send it along later. I was surprised when it actually arrived.

It isn't very clear, but you can tell the Stooges for sure. Notice my "Kilroy Was Here" t-shirt. If you want to run this, you have my permission.

M. Thomas Inge
Ashland, VA

Thanks, Tom! Here's the photo, somewhat out of focus, with Tom trying to take Shemp's place! Readers! Send more old photos of yourself with a comic book or with a cowboy hero, or of your Uncle Fred.

RC



Steve stoned

A few footnits about Steve Fears' letter on Caniff. The self-caricature that he sent along (a rather famous one) is indeed by Caniff; but the caricatures of his characters that loom behind him are by Ray Bailey, an assistant in the 1940s who, just after World War II, did a comic strip called *Bruce Gentry* that looked an awful lot like the sort of ex-pilot strip *Steve Canyon* would be a couple years later. I've included a photograph of the Steve Canyon statue, which is not in the town square at Idaho Springs, Colorado, but at the town's edge, where two highways converge. That's me worshiping at the statue's feet. The statue is there because of a series of carefully orchestrated flukes. In June 1947, as a publicity stunt staged by the *Denver Post* (whose publisher, Palmer Hoyt, was a big Caniff fan), a shallow depression called Squirrel Gulch in the nearby mountains was renamed Steve Canyon ("gulch" becomes "canyon"). An elaborate ceremony celebrating the christening took place on the last day of the annual Gold Rush Days held at Idaho Springs. Three years later, another bunch of Caniff admirers, the Indiana Limestone Company of Bedford, Indiana, offered to carve a monumental statue of Steve Canyon if an appropriate place could be found to display the sculpture. The canyon named Steve seemed the perfect spot, and so it came to pass. The ten-foot high, seven-and-a-half ton statue was duly transported to this little town a few minutes west of Denver where it was fitted with a plaque that dedicated the statue "to all airmen who wore the uniform of the armed forces of the U.S. in time of conflict and who stand ready in the Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard to fly again in defense of their country should the need arise." (The need was arising in Korea at just about that instant.) The statue presented Steve in the costume and pose that he assumed in the first promotional drawings for the strip, but it doesn't actually look much like Steve. Caniff, when we talked about it years later, agreed: "The guys who carved it are the

[continued on page 75]

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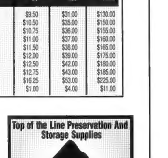

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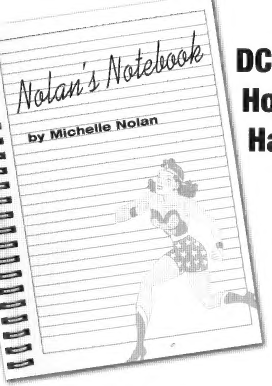

DC's Delicate Delinquents: How Three Uncommon Issues Handled a Common Concern

Juvenile delinquents ran wild throughout most of American pop culture after World War II, but the ranks of youth gone wrong were not too common in the world of DC Comics.

The topic wasn't taboo, yet the subject was always handled with taste by National Comics, as DC was known during the post-World War II heyday of films and other fictional portrayals of America's troubled youth.

There was nothing over the top with regard to violence about the way juvenile delinquency was approached by the Justice Society of America in *All Star Comics* #40 (Apr/May 1948), by a solo Robin the Boy Wonder in *Star Spangled Comics* #84 (Sep 1948) and by Superboy in *Adventure Comics* #197 (Feb 1954).

The problem of juvenile delinquency was handled, albeit infrequently, in other DC titles, heroic and non-heroic alike, but these three issues were among the few from the company to cover-feature the subject.

These comics, which now seem delightfully quaint, are part of a sizable sub-culture of post-war "JD collectible." They include other comics along with dozens of lurid paperback books and generally more sedate hardbound volumes, plus numerous more serious attempts at the sociology of the subject in books and magazines, in addition to numerous videos and film posters.

I have heard of collectors who have hundreds of these JD artifacts, which largely predate the drug culture of the mid-to-late 1960s and beyond. In some cases, though, collectors incorporate the drug world into the milieu.

And, of course, no serious collection of JD memorabilia, so to speak, would be complete without a copy of Dr. Fredric Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent*, the 1954 book that blamed much of the development of juvenile delinquency on comic books. Wertham assumed that since most juvenile delinquents read comic books, cause-and-effect was the result. What he ignored, of course, is that most other youngsters also read comics in the 1940s and '50s.

I'm not sure when the phrase "juvenile delinquency" was first used, either in a serious or fictional context, but the phrase is prominently placed on the covers of *All Star* #40 and *Star Spangled* #84 in what my research shows to be groundbreaking usage.

The phrase probably dates at least to the 1930s, when Warner Brothers made a highly popular series of important, albeit sensationalized, films about the topic. These movies usually featured the likes of Humphrey Bogart or Jimmy Cagney along with the Dead End Kids, the memorable teen gang that movie-debuted in the 1937 Warner Bros. epic *Dead End*.

I saw all those films during Warner Brothers theater and television revivals in the 1970s and '80s—I loved those old Warner Brothers flicks!—but I'm not sure if "juvenile delinquency" was ever used as a phrase in any of them. "Young hooligans" or "hoodlums" were more often the operative terms during the Jazz

All Star Comics #40 (Apr/May 1948), one of the toughest to find.

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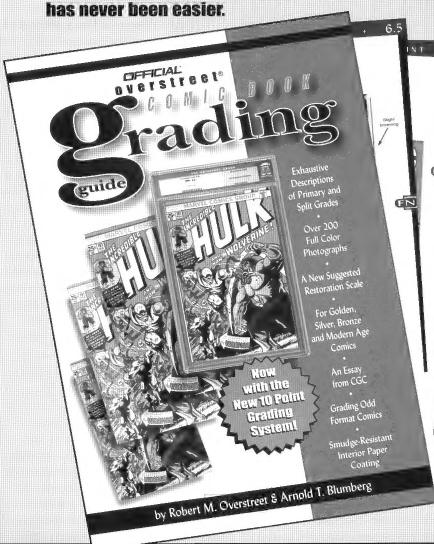

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Age of the Roaring '20s and the ensuing Great Depression.

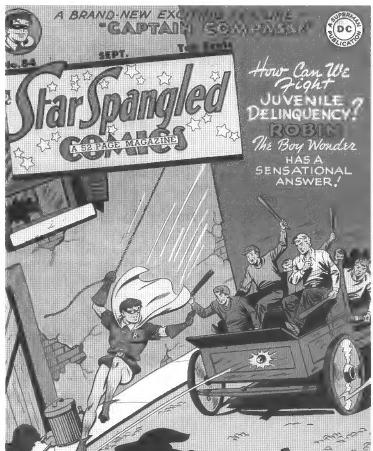
Concern over juvenile delinquency reached a frenzy in the Fifties, but at least a small percentage of American youth already had been running wild for 30 years or more, in terms of feeling a social and cultural alienation from their elders. From the standpoint of popular culture, this earlier form of juvenile delinquency was reflected primarily in films. On the other hand, I've seen thousands of pulp magazines, but I can't remember ever seeing the cover of a 1930s or '40s pulp specifically devoted to teenagers in trouble. (Will Murray would know, if anyone does! Hey, Will—are there JD pulp covers?)

Considering that pulps took on every possible type of fiction, it's surprising that they didn't deal with juvenile delinquency at least tangentially. More likely, it just shows that the topic wasn't really on the cultural radar until the pulps were in decline by the 1950s and paperbacks were on the rise.

For reference, by the way, I used a wonderfully informative book entitled *The JD Films* (1982) by Mark Thomas McGee and R.J. Robertson. It's one of those notably dense McFarland volumes that covers pop culture topics in remarkable depth, and includes a filmography of every major movie with a theme of juvenile delinquency.

In addition, *Teenage Confidential* (1998) by Michael Barson and Steven Heller, from Chronicle Books, provides one of the best overviews of juvenile delinquency as reflected in pop culture. The book reprints numerous movie posters and paperback covers, including the poster for *Where Are Your Children?*, a 1944 Monogram cheapie. That film—which came out the same year as the noted director Val Lewton's much better-known *Youth Runs Wild* for RKO—was among the first films to blatantly exploit juvenile delinquency.

The poster for *Where Are Your Children?* uses the phrase "youthful delinquency." Yet "juvenile delinquency," as a phrase, pops up in several earlier World War II era magazines, as referred to in *Teenage Confidential*.



Star Spangled Comics #84 (Sep 1948); what makes a boy bad?

The first of the lurid paperbacks to exploit the delinquency phenomenon were not published until the late 1940s—indeed, all of them, as far as I know, came out after *All Star* #40 and *Star Spangled* #84. In fact, those two comic books seem to be among the first works of fiction to refer to "juvenile delinquency" in the modern manner. As such, they are important cultural relics.

All Star Comics #40 is part of one of the best-known, and most well-annotated, series of Golden Age comics, but *Star Spangled* #84 and *Adventure* #197 are seldom seen. That is not to say *All Star* #40 is common—it's actually one of the toughest issues in the series to find. None of these three comics are pictured in the generally excellent *Teenage Confidential*, which includes cover photos of several romance and teen-themed comics.

By far the best early comic book explorations of juvenile delinquency occurred in Charles Biro's post-war stories for Lev Gleason's *Boy Comics* (and, to a lesser extent, in Biro's companion *Daredevil Comics*). Those stories, with many more times the number of words used in most comics, can't even begin to be adequately explored here, but I did not want to leave even a remote impression that DC did the best in-depth job on the topic. That honor definitely goes to Biro.

Even so, the DC issues are still noteworthy for even attempting to provide a take on the topic, especially since they are definitely among the first comic books to tackle the problem. As is typical of virtually all DC comics of the period, the outcomes are distinctly upbeat.

I haven't read all the early Superboy stories of the 1945-47 period, but I believe Robin was the first DC costumed hero to tackle juvenile delinquency on a solo basis. Batman made a few fulltime appearances, plus plenty of cameos, in the Robin strip in *Star Spangled* #65-130. Yet "The Third Street Gang!" in *Star Spangled* #84 is one of the few stories in the series in which there is no clue what-

soever that the Caped Crusader even exists in Robin's world.

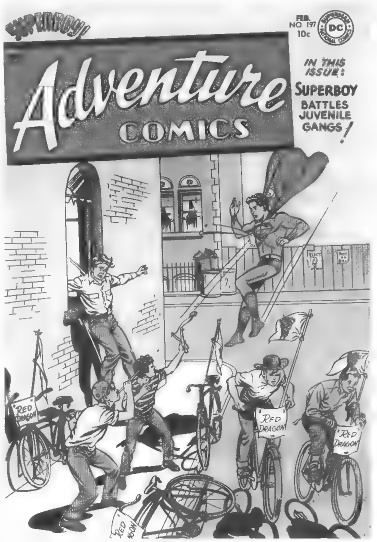
The story begins this way: "What makes a boy bad? Does he want to be bad, or does he act tough because he's afraid the world will call him a sissy? Does he fight the kid from the next block because he hates him, or because he hasn't yet learned about sportsmanship? These and other questions perplex Robin, the Boy Wonder, as he tackles the toughest case of his career—juvenile delinquency and the Third Street Gang!"

Police commissioner Gordon, our old friend who so often flashed the Bat Signal, sends Robin on a mission to use what Gordon calls "child psychology" to determine why delinquents are, well, delinquent. Robin disguises himself as a "tenement youngster," as the story calls him, to infiltrate the gang. He wins their confidence by knocking out one of them with one punch, then unwittingly finds himself part of a group that steals potatoes from a struggling grocer.

After foiling a more serious crime, and later preventing the robbery of a blind man by throwing a guilt trip at gang members, Robin convinces them that it wasn't right to steal from the grocer, either. This little plot-packed epic then continues with the gang deciding the grocer deserves to receive the financial benefits of a mink coat stolen from a rich woman, and with Robin thus trying to figure out a way to show them that giving away stolen property is not cool, no matter how noble the motivation.

But before Robin can solve the problem, he intercedes in a gang war with the Second Street Gang—Gotham City must have been absolutely teeming with gangs on every street. He convinces them that playing in a sandlot baseball game—with Robin as the umpire!—is a better way to settle their differences. Meanwhile, the grocer is arrested for accepting stolen property and the Third Street Gang guys must decide whether to 'fess up or see an innocent man go to jail.

They barge into the courtroom declaring, "We thought it was okay to steal from the rich and give to the poor…but now we know we're wrong! You can't steal without somebody sufferin' for it sometime! Now we're ready to take our medicine!" But the judge lets them go because the entire affair turns out to be a truth test set up by Robin, who tells the thankful kids that they can repay him "by teaching other youngsters what you've learned…that kids would rather be loved than hated…that they'd rather be good than bad!"



Adventure Comics #197 (Feb 1954), Smallville's Wild Ones!

This little down-to-earth gem really isn't a bad piece of writing. In fact, it's easy to imagine a youngster being inspired by this reasonably realistic tale.

Superboy's battle against delinquents in *Adventure* #197, however, isn't nearly as well handled. The *Superboy* and *Adventure* titles of the 1950s were loaded with numerous well-done and at times even genuinely touching human-interest tales, but, alas, this is not one of them.

In *Clark Kent—Toughie!* Smallville High's principal commissions Superboy's alter ego to infiltrate the Skull and Crossbones or the Red Dragons, two of the town's teen gangs—how many teen gangs could there have been in Smallville!? It's a concept that defied the internal logic of the series. After all, DC already had been spending nearly a decade convincing the population of Smallville that Clark Kent was too timid to be Superboy!

After shocking his friends and teachers with a series of events that included drawing chalkboard caricatures of his teachers, throwing erasers, launching spitballs and giving hotfoots, Clark is forced to wear a dunce cap. "Ahh! Go chase yourself!" he tells the teacher who forces him to wear it. After school, one of the members of Skull and Crossbones—approaching Clark on a bike with a big skull and crossbones symbol on the handlebars!—invites him to join the gang, and he uses his powers to pass the initiation tests.

Ultimately, Superboy gets wind of a teenage gang war with the Red Dragons. As they approach each other on bikes, armed with clubs and sticks, the leaders

[continued on page 74]

by Pat Calhoun

Uncle Charlie's Fables

Once upon a time Lev Gleason published five issues of *Uncle Charlie's Fables*, a comic book that featured "fairy tales" aimed at a young audience. This was in 1952, when comics were embracing a multitude of genres and achieving all-time sales highs. The avuncular Charles Biro, Gleason's lead writer-artist-editor-idea man, made this short run memorable. His mastery of plot and character produced utterly engaging stories imbued with a "golden rule" morality that made sure the kiddies were inspired as well as entertained.

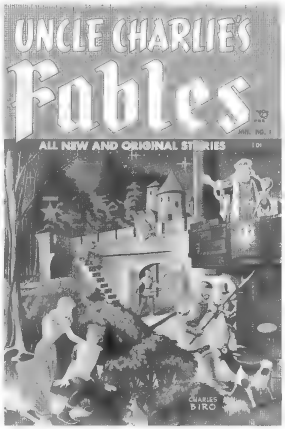
Biro first came to prominence writing and drawing "Steel Sterling," the cover feature in MLJ's *Zip* anthology title that debuted with #1 cover-dated February 1940. Biro probably helped create the man who fell into a vat of molten metal and emerged a super-hero. Soon he began a long association with editor and publisher Lev Gleason—producing the stylish Daredevil in 1941 in his own title, followed by Crimebuster (in *Boy*) in 1942. Both these characters continued through the early 1950s. As regards the 1952 Uncle Charlie, it should be noted that the group of kid sidekicks in *Daredevil* (the "Little Wise Guys") proved so popular they virtually took over the title in 1945. And Crimebuster was one of the more believable "boy" heroes. Young characters were Biro's strongest suit, so they knew what they were doing when they decided to populate the fables with them.

Uncle Charlie's Fables #1 (Jan 1952) starts off with a beautiful Biro painted cover, and an equally charming inside cover photo of Biro sitting outside telling tales to a group of children. The front cover scene roughly represents the lead strip, Peter Pester, who, while working in the royal Bakery of Gladiola, still finds time to rescue Princess Denise and have fun with his friends. This strip led throughout the run, and it is Biro's character details of Peter's pals: Ginger Peachy, Pokey Slow, and Yak Yackety, that makes the stories sparkle, with added luster coming from the exuberant art by Hi Mankin.

Peter Pester was the only continuing strip in the series, "backed up" by several fables in each issue. "Michael the Misfit" is standard stuff about a poor boy who is discovered to be a long-lost prince; the best thing about this one is the "noble" narrative art of Fred Kida. "Janice and the Lazy Giant" has the big guy capture a little girl to do his housecleaning. When in due course he lets her escape her parents are doubly happy—for back home she's much better at doing chores than she was. It's cute, and Dick Rockwell's art is engaging. The splash

GEE, UNCLE CHARLIE, PLEASE TELL US A STORY. I'D LIKE ONE ABOUT A POOR BOY WHO BECOMES KNIGHTED OR SOMETHING!
AW, PLEASE DON'T BE SILLY, CHARLIE!
I LIKE THE ONE WHERE SATISFY ALL OF YOU IS TO TELL FOUR
NO, TELL ONE ABOUT A GIANT!

Uncle Charlie and his young listeners get ready for a round of rousing fables on the inside front cover of the first issue.



Uncle Charlie's Fables #1 (Jan 1952) features a superb painted cover by the versatile Charles Biro. Artist-writer-editor-creator Biro is one of the key architects of comics' Golden Age.

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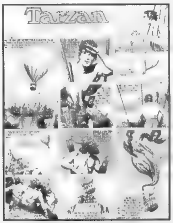
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Comic Strip Art
1942 Tarzan Sunday page hand-colored by Burne Hogarth.

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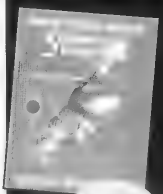

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"Janice and the Lazy Giant": The back covers of **Uncle Charlie's Fables** used the splash panels (with blurbs removed) of the stories Dick Rockwell illustrated in each issue. This lovely image hails from #1.

panel is nicely reproduced on the back cover as a "pin-up" bonus. Lastly, "Lawrence and the Fortune Teller" is mediocre as a yarn; but Bob Fujitani's drawing lifts it a little.

Peter Pester, Yak, Pokey, and Princess Denise all appear on Biro's cover for #4 (Jul 1952), and the inside front cover shows "Charlie's kids" hungry for another round of tales. In this issue Peter quits the bakery for stand-up comedy in "The Sad Jester." It's a hoot, but the three fables that follow are all forgettable. However, the art in them, repeat performances by Fujitani, Kida and Rockwell, makes for pleasant page-turning. In particular Rockwell's line work really fleshes out (to quote Unc) "the clang of steel, a brave young prince, a plea for mercy, a band of fearless outlaws, a kingdom at war, and Black Dog..." The story's splash panel again brightens the back cover.

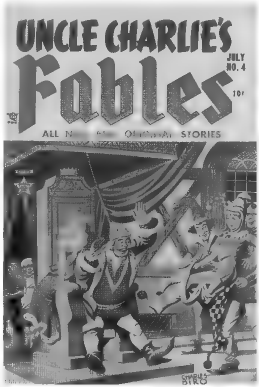
Gleason used "perfect packaging" in the Uncle Charlie books—which is to say that all four cover pages and all 32 inside pages were pure content. The inside back covers ran as "puzzle pages," and the postal requirements (for magazine status) were filled by a two-page text story. In #4 the text opus invokes the moral of "be prepared" as winter supplies are rounded up in "A Big Day For Squirrels."

Princess Denise gets abducted on Biro's painted cover for *Uncle Charlie's Fables* #5 (Sep 1952), the last issue. And Biro outdoes himself in the final Peter Pester—even using the inside cover portrait of Charlie and his little fans as a prologue. Peter and the gang thwart an invading army by changing the road signs leading to Gladiola: the soldiers get lost in the woods where the kids have set booby traps. It's a jolly good ten-pager with Mankin's art capturing the colorful chaos.

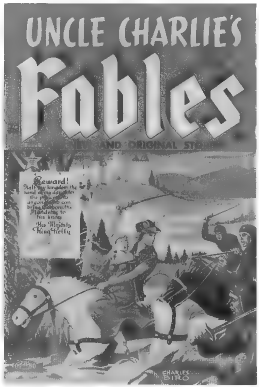
Then Dick Rockwell does another nice job on a negligible fable; with the splash panel again doing double duty to make a handsome back cover. That's followed by an effort with an equally shopworn plot but full of gypsy dancing and daggers vividly rendered by Norman Maurer—who did a lot of excellent work for Gleason. Lastly, "The Sleeping King" tells a tale that manages to find freshness with a variation on a theme as a clever young man helps a ruler deal with his perpetual drowsiness. Old pro Carl Hubbell's art is detailed and crisp and moves with narrative sureness.

The year of 1952 was the peak of crime and horror comics and the outcry against them. So *Uncle Charlie's Fables* also scored political points by being wholesome fare for young souls. Truth be told, although Gleason's popular crime books were graphic they were anything but perverse. Gleason was a champion of the "old fashioned" virtues. During the late 1940s when critics began accusing comics of promoting juvenile delinquency *Boy* ran the top banner: "A

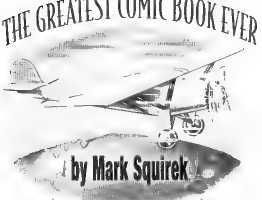
[continued on page 74]



Uncle Charlie's Fables #4 (Jul 1952) Peter Pester taking a turn at being court jester. This strip was the heart of the five-issue series, and showcased Biro's talent for creating credible and sympathetic young characters.



Uncle Charlie's Fables #5 (Sep 1952) is the last issue of a run that was designed both to appeal to young readers and to pacify critics who identified Gleason with violent and provocative crime comics.



Artifacts

How far would you go to recover some lost artifacts from your life? In the current run of *Green Arrow*, Oliver Queen goes pretty far. The most recent story arc, "Archer's Quest" (issues 16-21) begins at Ollie's grave and takes him through a good part of the DC Universe. Over the course of the story he runs into, among others, Superman, Oracle, Speedy, Solomon Grundy and, of course, Black Canary. It turns out he is on a journey through his past, recovering certain objects that mean something to him on some level.

During his visit to the Arrow Cave in issue 18, after a tremendous fight with Grundy, he leaves with what he came for: the Certificate that the Justice League gave him when he was inducted forty-odd years ago in *Justice League of America* #4.

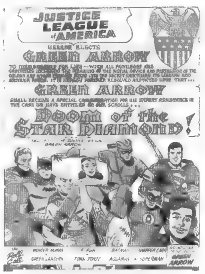
Did he grab a boxing glove arrow? Did he attempt to restart the Arrowcar? No. He grabbed his JLA Diploma.

Speedy can't believe it. "*That's* what you came for?" he says incredulously. Ollie can only reply "It's important to me. They gave it to me when I joined." (There is also a second reason, but you need to be reading this excellent modern age title to find out what it is).

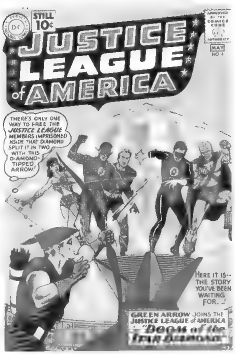
It is also important to us that he joined the JLA. By that time, the early sixties, many heroes had been given new incarnations. Flash first, Green Lantern second, then others such as Hawkman and Atom soon followed suit. Each character was a modern updating of a Golden Age hero. Until Denny O'Neil got his hands on the character in the late sixties, Green Arrow stayed virtually the same throughout the decade. From his first appearance in *More Fun* #73, through backup features in *World's Finest* and *Adventure*, he was the man with the trick arrows and an eerie similarity to Batman. When the JLA asked him to join, it conferred an unspoken credibility on the Emerald Archer.

The bright orange background of the cover certainly made *JLA* #4 stand out on the newsstands in early 1961. Underneath the JLA logo, a large diamond has imprisoned five of the mightiest Justice Leaguers. Their fate can only be decided by the skill of a Lone Archer—only by using an arrow tipped with the same material, another diamond, can he split their prison open.

Since the top half of the splash page contains the very certificate Ollie had been looking for in the story mentioned above, it kind of tips the hand on the outcome of the story. In addition, the bottom half has each Leaguer running towards the reader in celebration as the Martian Manhunter and Green Lantern lift Green Arrow onto their shoulders.



Gardner Fox starts the story way out in space. Several trillion miles away from earth, a returning hero has his spaceship destroyed by a dictator who is afraid that the returning conqueror could enflame his people with a desire to revolt. However, through his exposure to the rays of a highly magnetic planet, the hero has become invulnerable and cannot be killed.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GREEN ARROW JOINS THE JUSTICE LEAGUE of AMERICA!
"Doom of the STAR DIAMOND!"

The dictator decides to imprison him on faraway Earth and sends him there accompanied by three weapons, which will permanently blind him if he ever tries to leave the planet. As he hurtles toward earth, the hero, Carthan, becomes aware of the Justice League and decides he should ask for their help. One problem, an unfortunate side effect of his new indestructibility is that he cannot ask for their help, so he must pretend to be evil!

This incredibly elaborate, futuristic scenario (fully established by the middle of the second page!) eventually becomes undone by a single man with a weapon that is almost as old as Man himself.

As the exiled hero flies toward his new prison, the Justice League has been comfortably debating new admissions. After an hour of friendly debate, a smiling Batman jumps to his feet and says, "Madame Chairlady, I move that Green Arrow be elected unanimously!" The Manhunter seconds that motion and just as Wonder Woman calls for a vote, an arrow appears from nowhere and strikes

[continued on page 74]

MALCOLM ATER AND THE COMMERCIAL COMICS COMPANY

Commercial Comics

by Tom Christopher

© Tom Christopher 2003

Malcolm Ater Sr. was born in Jacksonville, Illinois, in 1915. He got a degree from Jacksonville College and took graduate courses at George Washington University. He was married in 1942 and fathered five children. He served in the Navy as an ensign during World War II, and upon discharge worked briefly for what he later described as the only company packaging commercial comics in New York City. This may have been M.C. Gaines' Educational Comics. He seems to have decided he could do the whole job himself, and tried to get a G.I. Business Loan for that purpose but was denied. Undaunted, in July 1946 he set up Malcolm Ater Productions in a ten dollar a month flat at 220 West 42nd Street in NYC with fifteen hundred dollars that can be assumed to have been savings or loans.

His first comic was *The History of Gas* (1947) done for the American Gas Association. It introduced the charming Miss Flame, telling the history of gas from its discovery by the Chinese centuries ago. Miss Flame was subsequently used as a gas industry trademark for over 20 years. Script and concept were by Malcolm Ater and art and character design by Jack Sparling.

The 1948 Presidential elections were approaching and Ater, a Democrat, approached the Republican party offering to produce comic books for them. "I thought that if anybody needed comic books—and could afford them—it was the Republicans," he reflected in 1950. Instead he was rebuffed with the criticism that the idea was "too undignified." Ater took his ideas to the Democratic National Committee via an old friend and ex-employer named V. Y. Dallman, whom Ater had seen on television during the Democratic Convention in Philadelphia. Ater had taken an overnight train from New York City and presented Dallman with the finished art to *The Story of Harry S. Truman*. Dallman was impressed and took Ater to the Democratic National Committee, who liked the idea well enough to eventually buy three million copies. There may have been earlier, obscure uses of comics in local elections, but this was the first use of a comic book in a state or national election. Jack Redding, Democratic publicity head, asserted that the comic book may have strongly influenced the election, particularly in the close states. The book is a full-sized comic, 16 pages, full-color with newsprint covers and known copies with glue and with saddlestich binding. It features script by Malcolm Ater and art by Jack Sparling.

The Republicans would eventually get on the comics bandwagon and produce their own *Ike and Dick* for the 1956 Presidential election.

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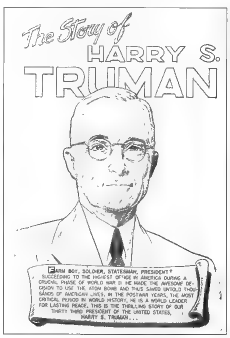
The Story of
HARRY S.
TRUMAN
GEE WHIZ, SO OUR STARTLING PRESIDENT SUCCEEDING TO THE HIGHEST OFFICE IN AMERICA DURING A CRUCIAL PHASE OF WORLD WAR II, HE MADE THE AWESOME DECISION TO USE THE ATOM BOMB AND THUS SAVED UNTOLD THOUSANDS OF AMERICAN LIVES. IN THE POSTWAR YEARS, THE MOST CRITICAL PERIOD IN WORLD HISTORY, HE IS A WORLD LEADER FOR LIFE! AND NOW, THE INSPIRING STORY OF OUR THIRTY-THIRD PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, HARRY S. TRUMAN...

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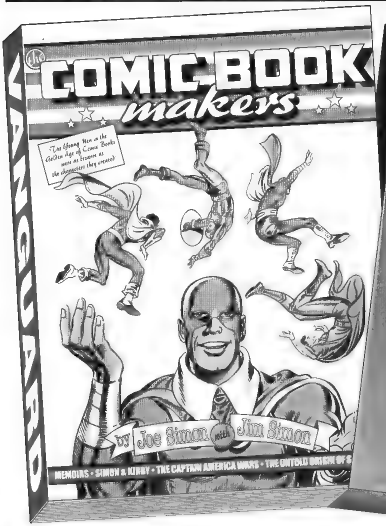
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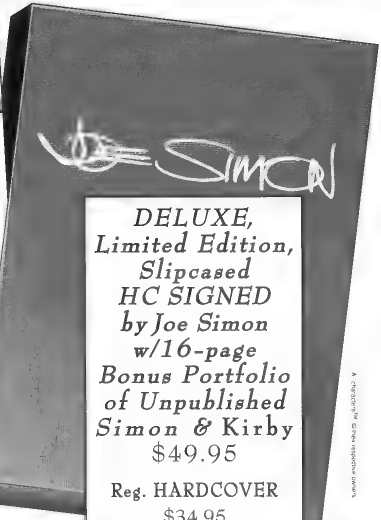

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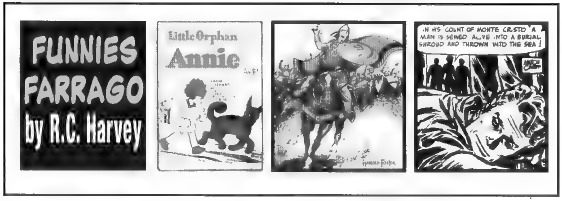

FUNNIES
FARRAGO
by R.C. Harvey
Little Orphan
Annie
IN HIS COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO A MAN IS SEWED ALIVE INTO A BURIAL SHROUD AND THROWN INTO THE SEA!

Bill Mauldin Fades Away:

The Old Soldier Gets a Yahtzee

With the saber-rattling, spur-jangling militarism of recent months still ringing in our ears, we'd like to pause here for just a darn minute to remember a man who found humanizing comedy in such behaviors—namely, Bill Mauldin, the greatest soldier cartoonist of them all, who died last winter.

Twice the subject of a *Time* cover story—at least once more than any other cartoonist—Bill Mauldin created some of the most memorable cartoon images of the 20th century, and in the end, he was honored for it as no other cartoonist—and few mere mortals—ever has been.

Mauldin was perfect for a career as a political cartoonist. He could draw anything, and he was eager to take on the establishment. "If I see a stuffed shirt," he would say, "I want to punch it." From which his advice to political cartoonists everywhere follows as logically as the day follows night: "If it's big, hit it. You can't go far wrong."

Mauldin was famous as an anti-authoritarian critic by the time he was twenty-four years old. He acquired his notoriety in the most authoritarian of societies, the U.S. Army during World War II: in the cartoons he drew for military newspapers, he depicted the life of the "dogface" (foot soldier) the way it was. Rained on and shot at and kept awake in trenches day and night, the combat soldier was wet, scared, dirty and tired all the time; and Mauldin's spokesmen—the scruffy, bristle-chinned, listlessly dull-eyed, stoop-shouldered Willie and Joe in their wrinkled and torn uniforms—were taciturn but eloquent witnesses on behalf of the prosecuted. Through simple combat-weary inertia, they defied pointless army regulations and rituals: they would fight the war, but they wouldn't keep their shoes polished.

Because they so faithfully represented the average foot soldier's plight and proclivities, Mauldin's cartoons were immensely popular with the men in the trenches. And that very popularity was an affront to generally accepted notions of military propriety, but Mauldin never wavered even after the Third Army's legendary General George S. Patton leaned on him.

Old Blood-and-Guts Patton could have had an alternate moniker, Old Spit-and-Polish, so dedicated was he to spic-

Mauldin's self-portrait from his **Chicago Sun-Times** days.

and-span uniform maintenance as a symbol of—and, indeed, as a significant contributor to—the highest military discipline, the sort necessary for successful battlefield operations. To Patton, Mauldin's Willie and Joe were seditious influences, and Mauldin was a dangerous anarchist.

"If that little son of a bitch sets foot in Third Army, I'll throw his ass in jail," Patton once fumed, loudly. But Patton's boss, Supreme Allied Commander General Dwight Eisenhower, thought otherwise. It was the soldiers' paper, he said; if you mess with it, it'll be bad for morale. But he also thought it would be a good idea for Patton to meet Mauldin, and so the cartoonist had an encounter with the martinet of the Third Army.

"Where did you ever see soldiers like that?" Patton asked Mauldin. "You know goddamn well you're not drawing an accurate representation of the American soldier. You make them look like goddamn bums. No respect for the army, their officers, or themselves. You know as well as I do that you can't have an army without respect for officers. What are you trying to do—incite a goddamn mutiny?"

Mauldin, however, was not much cowed by the tirade that Patton conducted for several long minutes, barely pausing to draw a breath. By the time they met in 1945, Mauldin, a baby-faced youth of 23, was celebrated throughout the armed forces as a man who spoke for the grunts in the field. His cartoons appeared regularly in *Stars and Stripes*, the famed serviceman's newspaper, and were syndicated stateside as *Up Front* by United Feature Syndicate. Mauldin, although he didn't act it, was doubtless as famous as Patton. The cartoonist, in short, stood his ground.

When Patton finally gave him the opportunity to speak, Mauldin defended himself in terms designed to appease the War's most notorious disciplinarian: "The average soldier has a lot to gripe about," Mauldin said, "and if he stews long enough about it, he's not going to be thinking about his job. But he picks up his paper and reads a letter or sees a cartoon by some other soldier who feels the same way, and he says, 'Hell, somebody else said it for me,' and he goes back to his job."

"I see Comp'ny E got th' new style gas masks, Joe."

A classic image of Willie and Joe.

Mauldin knew, as few cartoonists do, exactly how his cartoons worked.

But his explanation didn't change Patton's mind: if the soldiers in the field were "stewing" about their lot in life, the general opined, it's because they didn't have enough to do.

Patton didn't change Mauldin's mind either. Willie and Joe remained bedraggled in the extreme and unshaven in perpetuity.

And Mauldin persevered in depicting the numbing boredom and menacing danger and foxhole mud of the soldier's life, poking fun at army brass and exposing regulations as clueless whenever they meet reality as he bumped along the frontlines in the jeep assigned to him by General Mark Clark, commander of the forces in Italy, so that he wouldn't have to hitchhike wherever he went.

By the time Mauldin arrived in the European theater of the war, he was no longer, strictly speaking, a rifleman, a frontline foot soldier. He was assigned to division headquarters and worked full-time as a soldier cartoonist, but he spent much of his time out in the field, squatting in dugouts listening to GIs tell their stories. Stories about jeeps and foxholes and K-rations and other primitive conditions.

WHADDA MATTER, JOE?
IT AIN'T THAT I MIND A FIFTY POUND PACK, A TEN POUND RIFLE, AN' TWENTY POUNDS O' ASSORTED CLOTHES AN' EQUIPMENT... BUT WHEN I GOTTA CARRY TH' ROAD TOO, I'M THRU!

Joe was the hook-nosed one at first in cartoons Mauldin drew while the 45th was still in training camp.

"My, sir—what an enthusiastic welcome!"

This is one of two cartoons that Patton used to explain to Mauldin how detrimental he was to morale. Here, a display of rampant disrespect for officers.

"The guys eat my tail if I muff a point," he told Frederick Painton of the *Saturday Evening Post*, which did a story about him in the March 17, 1945 issue.

"This was especially true in the infantry," Mauldin later explained at greater length, "where a man lived intimately with a few pieces of equipment and resented seeing it pictured inaccurately. Once I drew the safety ring on the wrong side of a hand grenade hanging from a man's belt. It was a tiny thing, and I couldn't find a razor blade to scratch out the detail for a correction, so I was tempted to let it go. In the end, though, I signed my name backward and asked the engraver to reverse the whole drawing. I never regretted it."

Mauldin's drawing style for the wartime cartoons was wonderfully evocative of the ambiance of the dogface's life. He drew with a brush, and his lines were bold and fluid but clotted with heavy black areas, clothing and background detail disappearing into deep trap-shadow darkness that gave the pictures a grungy aspect that approximated visually the damp and dirty feelings bred by the miserable field conditions of a soldier's life on front lines everywhere. Willie and Joe looked like they needed a bath, and so did many of their readers.

The images of Mauldin's reportage of the raw ironies of the battlefield—relieved, thankfully, by the sardonic sense of humor that found a common humanity alive and well amid the tedium and hazards of combat life—won Mauldin the first of his two Pulitzer Prizes in 1945.

That was the year the book *Up Front* was published, and it was No. 1 on the *New York Times* bestseller list for 18 months. In the prose he wrote to accompany his cartoons, Mauldin talked about the inspiration for this cartoon and that. He also wrote about life in the military—his life and the lives of the soldiers he knew.

Some of his discourse is amusing in a sort of gently sarcastic "ain't life funny" way. He writes about the inequities inherent in the military hierarchy: officers have separate latrines which enlisted men can't use, but if the officers' latrine is further away and it's raining, the officers feel no compunction about using the nearest enlisted men's latrine. Medics didn't get combat pay, but they were under fire as much as their rifle-toting comrades.

Reading Mauldin, you get a good sense of what combat infantrymen live through, what they gripe about, and what makes them tick. You also find out what makes soldiers laugh. And you laugh, too, and then shake your head in wonderment if not disbelief. As a personal account of his adventures as an observer on the front lines during war and, hence, as a record of the things most soldiers thought about when not keeping their heads down, *Up Front* may be the best book about war there is.

Contrary to popular belief, Mauldin wasn't with the daily *Stars and Stripes* for the entire War. He didn't join the *S&S* staff until the allied campaign reached Naples in December 1943. His initial cartooning in the service, three years of it, was done for the *45th Division News*, a weekly paper.

Mauldin joined the Army in September 1940, before the U.S. was in the War.

Born in 1921, he'd grown up in a somewhat haphazard fashion in New Mexico and Arizona, a cheerfully mischievous youth, survivor of a broken but loving home, who, at the age of 17, made his way to the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts with money loaned him by his maternal grandmother. He met gag cartoonist George Lichty (short for Lichtenstein) of *Grin and Bear It* fame who shared a studio with Paul Battenfield, editorial cartoonist for the *Chicago Times*. He also took a course in political cartooning taught by Vaughn Shoemaker of the *Chicago Daily News*.

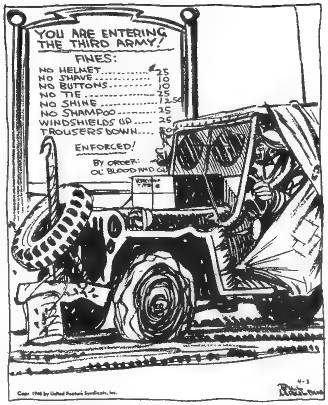
Mauldin sold a few gag cartoons from time to time but subsisted by drawing restaurant posters in exchange for meals. After a year in the Windy City, he returned to the Southwest, settling, briefly, in Phoenix, where he did posters and political cartoons for various politicians.

This hand-to-mouth existence ended, finally, when he joined the Arizona National Guard, which was almost immediately "federalized"—made a part of the regular Army. He was in the quartermaster corps of the 45th Division, which was made up of Guard units from three other states, New Mexico, Colorado and Oklahoma. One of the Oklahomans had been editor of the *Daily Oklahoman* in civilian life, and he decided to start a weekly newspaper, a venture without precedent on the divisional level anywhere in the American military. Noticing there were no cartoons in the paper, Mauldin arranged to be introduced to the editor and soon thereafter found himself assigned to the paper on Friday afternoons to draw cartoons. The rest of the week, he continued scrubbing pots and pans and toilets in typical Army fashion. Realizing that a soldier's life consisted of more than KP duty, Mauldin asked to be transferred to the more army-like infantry so he'd encounter more viable material for cartoons (and escape KP). As a rifleman in the infantry, Mauldin was closer to the experiences most soldiers have.

He entered the Italian campaign when the 45th invaded Sicily on July 10, 1943. The appearance of his drawings, at first embellished with the gray tones of grease-crayon shading, changed as he mastered graphic mannerisms that the printing equipment couldn't erode. And the soldiers in the pictures changed, too, becoming hard-eyed, hollow-cheeked and lethal. And always in need of a shave.

Willie and Joe, his durable duo, weren't much in evidence at first. They were there, occasionally, but they were not recognizable. At first, as far back as training camps, Joe was the hook-nosed character, "a smart-assed Choctaw Indian," Mauldin said, and Willie was "the red-necked straight man." The Native American ploy was undoubtedly an appeal to Mauldin's own unit, K Company, which was composed of men from Oklahoma, many of them Indians.

"As Willie and Joe matured overseas," Mauldin explained, "during the stresses of shot, shell, and K-rations, and grew whiskers because shaving water was scarce in the mountain foxholes, for some reason Joe seemed to become more of a Willie and Willie more of a Joe."



'Radio th' ol' man we'll be late on account of a thousand-mile detour."

Willie and Joe never encountered Patton: they went around him.

'Them buttons was shot off when I took this town, sir.'

The classic image emerged as the 45th moved up the Italian boot to Naples.

"If you see Willie, tell him Joe's lookin' fer him. He swiped my razor."

Patton objected to Mauldin's bearded dogfaces. The cartoonist kept them unshaven—except on rare occasions. And it was a good plan: we didn't know them when they shaved

"He's right, Joe. When we ain't fightin' we should ack like sojers."

The enunciation of a dogface's philosophy.

As the 45th progressed up the Italian peninsula, Willie and Joe showed up more and more often in Mauldin's cartoons, and quickly endeared themselves—and their creator—to their brethren on the front lines. Mauldin, when he thought about it, wasn't surprised:

"They're the little people in peace," he said of his comrades in arms, "and they're the little people who always have to win a war. I'm a little guy myself. I was in this man's Army when it was an infant, and we kinda grew up together. All I know—as a grown up—is Army life. Everything that has happened to them has happened to me—except the final pay-off."

To say that Mauldin was beloved by the common soldier may not be putting it too strongly. He was also flagrantly admired.

CBS's Andy Rooney, who served on the *Stars and Stripes* during the war, said of Mauldin: "He was a genius—and I don't use the word lightly. He was sharp, bitter and funny all at the same time."

Famed war correspondent Ernie Pyle wrote about the soldier cartoonist, and Mauldin's cartoons were soon syndicated to stateside newspapers nationwide. Mauldin refused to give up ownership of Willie and Joe, though, and in the compromise deal with United Feature Syndicate, he took a cut in pay as a result.

Mauldin never drew cartoons about dead soldiers or death, but at the end of the War, he considered killing off his dogface pair but gave up the idea when the *S&S* editor told him he wouldn't publish a cartoon about their deaths.

Mauldin returned to civilian life a celebrity, and United Feature Syndicate wanted him to continue with cartoons about soldiers returning to civilian life. Under a succession of titles *(Sweatin' It Out, Willie and Joe, Bill Mauldin's Cartoon)*, Willie and Joe shed their shabby uniforms and dressed in mufti. But they didn't look very comfortable. Mauldin's bold brush strokes and trap-shadow shading, ideally suited to depicting the gritty life at the front, made his civilians look like bums. But that wasn't all that was going awry.

Initially, the circulation of his feature doubled, but Mauldin soon found that his approach to cartooning wasn't working in civilian life. He had started by reflecting the returning GI's experience—their anger at shortages, no housing for themselves and their new families and few goods and fewer jobs, and at unthinking yahoos who failed, apparently, to appreciate sufficiently the sacrifices the erstwhile dogfaces had made. His ire up, he went on to assault segregation and racism, the Ku Klux Klan, and then right-wing veterans' organizations and politicians. While taking essentially the same satirical stance that he'd taken in the service, his cartoons were now seen as "political" rather than "entertaining," and newspapers dropped his feature quickly, saying they had their own political cartoonist.

Mauldin wrote about his post-war experiences in a book called *Back Home*. It is an extraordinary opus of self-examination. Mauldin writes about his post-war cartoon, about how difficult it was for soldiers to adjust to civilian life, about post-war social evils, and about how baffled he was by his own failure to achieve success.

Willie and Joe's caustic laid-back humor just didn't work on the home front.

"I really didn't know who they were anymore," Mauldin said when interviewed in 1995. "They lost their identity when the war was over. They were a flop at home, and I stopped drawing them."

Mauldin realized he couldn't cope with what was happening to him and be a good cartoonist. So he dropped out for about a decade, writing books, acting in movies, and running for Congress in 1956. Milton Caniff lived in the same district, and the two became good friends. Caniff drew campaign posters for Mauldin, and Caniff's wife, Bunny, was Mauldin's treasurer. But Mauldin didn't win: it was a densely Republican district, and he was a flaming liberal Democrat.

In 1958 on one of his wanderings through the wilderness, Mauldin dropped in to visit Daniel Fitzpatrick, the political cartoonist at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, and learned that Fitz was retiring. Mauldin promptly applied for the job. He got it, and suddenly, Mauldin's liberal voice had a home again. Winning his second Pulitzer in 1959 and the National Cartoonists Society's Reuben as "Cartoonist of the Year" in 1961, Mauldin continued the battle he had begun in the army. "I'm against oppression," he said, "—by whomever."

In 1962, he made an unusual agreement to join the staff of the *Chicago Sun-Times*, "not as its editorial page artist," he explained, "but as a sort of 'cartoon commentator.'"

He wanted to be on the op-ed page rather than the editorial page because he didn't want anyone to think he endorsed the newspaper's opinions. And he didn't work always in the office. "I was free to say what I pleased," he wrote, "and travel where I wanted, so long as I got my stuff in on time."

Mauldin was away from the office—albeit not far—on that Friday we all remember, November 22, 1963, the day he would produce his most memorable cartoon. He had finished his week's work before noon and went with Ralph Otwell, the paper's managing editor, to a luncheon speech on foreign policy. The speech was never given.

"Halfway through dessert," Mauldin wrote, "the news that President Kennedy had been shot spread through the room."

Soon, they knew Kennedy had died of his wound. Mauldin and Otwell headed back to the newspaper office.

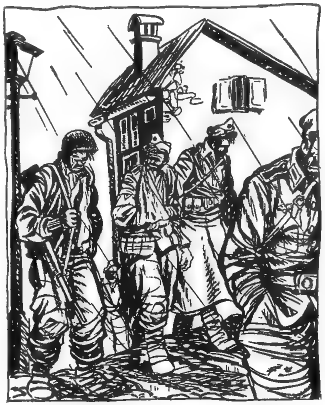
"I was amazed at how upset I was," Mauldin recalled. "There is nothing like doing familiar chores in familiar surroundings to keep your keel under you. I started working at 2 p.m., one hour after the President had been declared dead.

"What to draw? Grief, sorrow, tears weren't enough for this event. There had to be monumental shock. Monument—shock—a cartoon idea is nothing more-or-less than free association. What is more shocking than a statue come alive, showing emotion. Assassination. Civil rights. There was only one statue for this."

Maudlin drew the now familiar picture of the statue of Lincoln in the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, bent forward in his seat, head in his hands, a perfect posture of grief, an

"Beautiful! Is there one for the enlisted men?"

Time magazines for April 9, 1945 and for June 18, 1945. Patton was "covered" for his activities with the 3rd Army, Mauldin's Willie because he was created by Bill Mauldin, who got two and a half pages of story and art and photos inside.



Fresh, spirited American troops, flushed with victory are bringing in thousands of hungry, ragged, battle-weary prisoners. **(News item)**

Mauldin won his first Pulitzer for this cartoon in 1945.

"I won the Nobel Prize for Literature. What was your crime?"

Mauldin's second Pulitzer came midway through the Cold War in 1958 for this cartoon, which refers to the Russian novelist Boris Pasternak. Mauldin said the circumstance prompted a wag on the **Post-Dispatch** to remark that it was the first time anybody ever parlayed another man's Nobel into his own Pulitzer.

Drawn on the day Kennedy was assassinated.

emblem of national mourning.

It was so effective a device that it would inspire a generation of editorial cartoonists. Henceforth, tragedy and death were often symbolized by an inanimate artifact weeping. The most celebrated, perhaps, being the Statue of Liberty, shedding a tear as the twin towers of the World Trade Center burned in the distance on September 11, 2001.

"I started the drawing at 2:15 p.m.," Mauldin said, "and finished at 3 p.m.—the fastest I had ever worked. An average cartoon takes three or four hours. I almost threw it away (after all, my week's work was done, and nobody expected this one) because I couldn't get his hair right. No matter what I did with it, it looked more like Kennedy hair than Lincoln hair. This might confuse some people who weren't familiar with the statue. Then I decided that if they didn't know the statue, they wouldn't get the cartoon anyway."

In an unprecedented move, the *Chicago Sun-Times* published the cartoon on the back page, giving the tabloid an alternative cover.

"Our first edition was on the street at 4:45 p.m.," Mauldin said. "Later I was told that most Chicago news dealers sold the paper with the cartoon side up."

Mauldin easily ranks in the top ten American political cartoonists of the 20th century. He's in that pantheon because he hit his subjects hard, pulling no punches in presenting his opinion, and because he did it by yoking words to pictures for emphatic, memorable statements that were often powerful visual metaphors. But with Willie and Joe, Mauldin did something more: he created myth. At least a score of the cartoon images of Willie and Joe are iconographic, imprinted with every wrinkle and whisker intact into the cultural consciousness of American popular arts.

He cartooned for the *Chicago Sun-Times* for almost three decades. Eventually, Mauldin moved back to New Mexico where he grew up. He settled in Santa Fe, where, for amusement, he worked on old automobiles and a 1946 Willys Jeep, exactly the vehicle he toured Europe with while in the Army. He sent his cartoons to Chicago electronically.

Officially, Mauldin retired in 1991. In a perverse way, his retirement, at last, was forced upon him: pursuing his avocation as auto mechanic, he had dropped a large car part on his drawing hand.

Then, sadly, in the early years of the 21st century, he developed Alzheimers. By the spring of 2002, he was in a nursing home in Orange County, California. He was very frail: he'd been badly burned in a household accident, and his cognitive skills were, mostly, gone. Much of the time, he lay in his bed, not speaking, just staring ahead.

He was not by any means abandoned. He had seven sons from his three marriages, and numerous grandchildren. Those who lived nearby were regular visitors, and the private care facility was a good one. But about this time, another WWII vet, Jay Gruenfeld, found out where Mauldin was and what condition he was in.

Gruenfeld decided that there were doubtless others who felt, as he did, "that Bill Mauldin did enough to lighten the grim

burden of WWII for those in service and at home, that he deserves some special treatment during his final years. You have to understand: Bill Mauldin was a paragon for us. He needed to know he wasn't forgotten."

He wrote letters to veterans groups, urging them to write to the old soldier in the nursing home. Word spread. Newspaper reporters and columnists heard about it, and wrote about it.

Letters started pouring in—from veterans and widows of WWII soldiers and children whose fathers and grandfathers had been in the war. Hundreds every day.

According to Diana Schilling, director of the facility, the cards and letters seemed to cheer up the man who waded ashore with the troops in the invasion of Sicily, armed only with a sketchbook and pen and ink.

"He just lights up," she said. "He gets a twinkle in his eye, and you can tell that he is feeling good."

They read the letters to him and then posted them on the walls, even on the ceiling of his room.

"You never forgot us," wrote an 80-year-old veteran of the 94th Infantry Division, "and we will never forget you."

A former pilot, David Nelson of Massachusetts, wrote about his flying hundreds of wounded soldiers from battlefields to hospitals. "In spite of their horrendous wounds, those who could speak would always ask if we had a copy of *Stars and Stripes* because they wanted to see what Willie and Joe were up to. Bill Mauldin brought smiles and laughter through buckets of tears. He is forever in the hearts of anyone who wore a U.S. uniform in that war."

Wherever the *Stars and Stripes* arrived, there would be Willie and Joe, and when the soldiers in the foxholes found the cartoon, they knew they weren't alone. No matter how bad it was, someone understood—and here was the evidence. Bill Mauldin understood. And he had found something that could make them smile, if only for a moment. Now all the former dogfaces were returning the favor, putting a smile on his face, doing for him what he had done for them.

Old soldiers who lived nearby came to visit. The staff noticed that his outlook would improve during such visits—as if hearing stories of those distant days in Italy momentarily revived his faltering capacity to remember and somehow reconnected him to the world.

Another campaign started to recruit vets to visit Mauldin. To prevent a deluge of well-wishers all at once, visitors were assigned days and times to arrive. "It seems right," wrote Gordon Dillow of the *Orange County Register*, "that before he leaves this life, Bill Mauldin should get to spend a little time with the guys who used to be Willie and Joe."

In the last six months or so of his life, Mauldin had visitors every day, sometimes a nearly steady stream of them.

"Some of the men cry," Schilling reported. "One man said—walking down the hallway, tears streaming down his face—'I'm not supposed to do this. I'm a man.' Those 60-year-old emotions are just pouring out. Some guys stand in the lobby and cry. They can't believe they are finally going to meet Bill Mauldin. They have a connection to him that's extraordinary—a connection that

"Investigate them? *Heck, that's mah posse."*

Bitterness in Mauldin's post-war work. Mauldin assaulted racism wherever he found it.

"Joe, yestiddy ya saved my life an' I swore I'd pay ya back. Here's my last pair of dry socks."

I didn't anticipate."

"Some are a little sad when they leave his room, because of his condition," another staffer said, "but they are thrilled. This is Bill Mauldin."

"Aim between th' eyes, Joe--sometimes they charge when they're wounded."

The original of this cartoon was the only one still in Mauldin's possession by fall, 2002; he'd given the rest to an infantry museum in Oklahoma.

(above) John Trever's tribute to Mauldin was one of a score that used the same image. (right) Mauldin drew an aging Willie for a special 25th anniversary celebration of the **Stars and Stripes**.

Bill Thomas, 78, explained: "Combat is a time when men get closer than brothers, closer than family, because you have to rely on each other so much. We relied on Mauldin to break the tension for a moment, just a moment. He meant an awful lot to a lot of us."

When Mauldin died, at last, on January 22, 2003, of pneumonia, a complication arising from Alzheimers, his departure was widely heralded by the nation's editorial cartoonists, whose drawings commemorated the achievements of a highly regarded member of their inky-fingered fraternity.

The editorial cartoons memorializing Mauldin's death created what *Slate* cartoonist Daryl Cagle calls a "Yahtzee." A Yahtzee, named after the popular game, happens when five or more cartoonists draw the same cartoon at the same time. In this case, it was a drawing of a soldier's helmet on top of a giant pen thrust into the ground, evocative of the traditional rifle-and-helmet battlefield grave marker of WWII. The greatest Yahtzee recently was the aforementioned depiction of the Statue of Liberty weeping after September 11, an image that appeared in nearly every newspaper. The Yahtzee of the grave marker for Mauldin was a greater tribute than most of its viewers realized: Mauldin set the fashion for the kind of cartoon of which Yahtzees are made when, years ago, he made Lincoln grieve at the death of Kennedy.

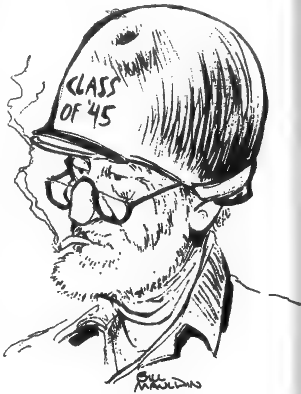
Bill Mauldin was buried at Arlington National Cemetery on January 29. It was a cold and rainy day. As Mark Sherman noted for his AP story, "Willie and Joe would not have been surprised." It was somehow supremely fitting that the champion of the always soaked and chilled dogface should be laid to rest on a wet and chilly day.

An honor guard carried his flag-draped coffin. Seven riflemen fired three volleys, and a bugler played taps. "They were all soaked by the rain," Sherman wrote, "standing at attention for a man who disdained the pomp and ceremony of military life."

But his son David was sure his father would have appreciated the precision of the ritual.

Talking to Sherman afterwards, David spoke of the mounds of mail he'd opened in recent weeks. One package in particular had moved him to tears, he said. It contained a clean, dry pair of socks from a WWII vet.

Perfect.



Russ Heath

Interview by
S.C. Ringgenberg

Ringgenberg: Russ, how did you get into in comics?

Heath: Well, it was during vacation when I was in high school. My father, working in New York City, met someone who had a connection with Holyoke Publishers and suggested that I go in and show my work. So, I went and they gave me a script, and that was my first job.

Ringgenberg: What kind of samples did you bring in to show them?

Heath: I think I had done a bunch of regular drawings, but I had some comic pages that I had done. When you're a kid, you always do your own comic type of thing, and I had done a bunch of that.

Ringgenberg: Were you doing newspaper strips or comic book pages?

Heath: More like newspaper Sunday pages.

Ringgenberg: Who were the artists you were interested in when you were beginning?

Heath: Well, I saved a lot of Hal Foster's *Tarzan* pages, and then he quit doing that and started *Prince Valiant*, and he really hit a level there after a year or so. You know, it was a big jump in his work from *Tarzan* to *Prince Valiant*. And I just didn't think there was anybody better than Foster.

Ringgenberg: So, you were drawn to more realistic stuff from the beginning?

Heath: Yeah, I had always wanted to be an illustrator and, of course, no one had television, so the only way to see anything that was being done was magazines or newspapers. The comic syndicated strips were something that you read every day, or the adventure ones. There weren't too many funny ones in those days. Now, they're all funny, or supposedly funny.

Ringgenberg: Were you reading comic books at the time?

Heath: Yes, I was. Not as much as some of the guys were, but I had my share. It was kind of normal for everybody to have a few stacks of comic books around. I had Big Little Books, which were of reprints from syndicated strips, although some of them were original ones…. Some of the movies, you know, Tom Mix and all that stuff.

Ringgenberg: I think, for instance, the Flash Gordon ones were panel blowups from the Sunday strip.

Heath: Right. I had a couple of those. I wish I still had one of them. They're probably worth a hundred bucks a piece now.

Ringgenberg: Speaking of Flash Gordon, did you like Alex Raymond as well as Foster?

Heath: Oh, yeah. The trouble with those two was the balloons. I thought the balloons should go to the people and not be separated. That's one of the reasons I started watching Caniff on *Terry and the Pirates*. It just seemed like somebody trying to be aloof, trying to put all [the] talking down at the bottom or up at the top in *Prince Valiant*.

Ringgenberg: Did that seem sort of snobby?

Heath: Yeah, it was not the way that I would have liked it to be. But, I didn't think long about it. I was mostly always interested in the artwork, and I was not big on stories. And of course, stories were never, at that time, very much in comic books. Of course the original comic books were all reprints of syndicated strips anyway, if you go way back.

Ringgenberg: True. You were around to see them suddenly appear, around '36 or so.

Heath: My first knowledge of a comic book was in a store when I was seven, with my mother, I guess, or my dad, and I bought the eleventh issue of *Famous Funnies*. That was my start on comic books. And the reason I eventually even started…after I got out of service to look for work [I was going] for illustration type beginnings…and it's just when I ran across, through necessity, the comics and I got an offer. [It was] bread and butter, and you can't turn it down. So that got me [started]. My work has always been rather illustrative rather than comicy.

Ringgenberg: Your work has matured over the years, but your style is still recognizably your style, even back in the fifties. That was one of the things I was struck by with your work. So many artists, their work changes over time. Yours got more realistic, but it always looked basically the same, at least to my eye.

Heath: Yeah. My father had been a cowboy, and we'd go to these Saturday afternoon movies [where] they had these serial things, like Tom Mix or The Lone Ranger, and he'd say, "Oh, no self-respecting cowboy would wear that fancy thingamabob there. Anybody that was really there, that *was* a cowboy would know that." And that, I guess, got me on the trail to be authentic so that your audience might believe that you have some knowledge of what the heck you're drawing.

Ringgenberg: With your dad being a cowboy, how much did you get to experience real cowboy life? Did you ever visit a ranch or anything?

Heath: No. Of course, in those days

every kid had a cowboy suit, and cowboys and Indians was a big game to play and we all played that because you didn't have television. In those days, you made your own fun. It wasn't organized for you. You weren't driven to it in a car. You went back in the woods and made a bonfire and stole quinces or apples and roasted 'em. You did your own thing. You had to.

Ringgenberg: I guess things were a lot freer in the old days.

Heath: Yeah. Some of the pranks we'd do on Halloween would now earn you jail time. Everything is so serious now.

Ringgenberg: Let me just jump back to your military career. What were you doing in the service, Russ?

Heath: Trying to stay out of the draft. I joined the Air Force and I took the accelerated course in school to try to finish high school before they called me, but the school normally let only good students take that because it was such an overload of work jammed up quicker. And they let me take it because apparently my IQ tests were high enough. They knew my grades were bad just because I was always drawing. But I didn't quite make it and went into the Air Force to be a cadet and was set to go to flight school and become a pilot, but then the war ended, so…

Ringgenberg: When did they cut you loose?

Heath: After nine months. I never got to preflight school.

Ringgenberg: So, you're just out of the service and you're looking for work. Was your attitude about comics that you'd take whatever they gave you?

Heath: Well, I didn't start to look for comics, really. Of course, I looked at anything and everybody. It was a whole different setup in those days. You could look up some of the great illustrators in the *Saturday Evening Post*—a lot of them were in New York—and I'd look them up in the phone book and call them up and they'd answer. I'd say, "I'd like to show you my portfolio." And they'd say, "Come on over this afternoon, after lunch." Which is, you know, unheard of today. They've got a barrier of secretaries to keep people out.

Ringgenberg: Who did you call up like that?

Heath: Oh…let's see, Albert Dorne. I went over and saw him, and Fred Ludeken. Oh, it was a pile. I couldn't begin to remember half the names of

them now. There must have been ten or twelve.

Ringgenberg: Austin Briggs?

Heath: I don't think so. Paul Raybet, I think, a whole bunch. And what would happen, you'd go to art studios, you'd go to ad agencies, and go anywhere that anyone suggested, and your list just kept getting longer because somebody would say, "Well, there may be something in three weeks, so come back." So you're re-hitting some of the ones you've been to. And everywhere you go you get three more names, so you never get through the list. I got on a train and went down to Philadelphia to go to the *Saturday Evening Post* offices and saw them. I went everywhere.

Ringgenberg: Well, what was your actual first published work?

Heath: It was two stories, that stuff that I had done in summer vacation in high school. But the steady stuff, the first comics was when I was looking for work while I was working [at an ad agency]. I finally had to, I wasn't making enough money, so I'd look for work at lunchtime. I caught Stan Lee in one day. I caught him, being that he wasn't out to lunch. It's not easy looking for work at lunchtime. He says, "Sure, I'll give you $75 a week." Doubled my salary right then and there from what I was making. So that pushed me into the comics. It's tough when you've got work on your table and there's a check somewhere written for it, to sit down and do work on spec, so you do what's on hand, and you hold off on doing samples for advertisements or whatever you might…think you want to do.

Ringgenberg: Did Stan give you a script right away?

Heath: I wasn't given a script, I was put on staff to draw in the place, and I think Two-Gun Kid was the first character that I worked on, penciling that. And I finally worked my way into inking it, after a lot of arguments and stuff, because in those days they usually were separated. Of course, to most extent, they've always been separated, pencilers and inkers. I thought that was a waste of a lot of pencil. You know, why put in the shading when you do that when you're inking it? And there wasn't any objection. You could do anything as long it worked out.

Ringgenberg: In those days were you penciling pretty simple?

Heath: Well, it's simple compared to anything that I've seen done now. [Laughs] Everybody completes every line. It's unbelievable. You'd realize if you ever saw some of the sketches that were done for the very first Superman or some of that.

Ringgenberg: Yeah. I've seen some of that stuff here and there.

Heath: It's just roughs really, what we call roughs. They weren't finished pencils by any means. And they just inked right over that.

Ringgenberg: Were you more interested in doing the pencils or the inks?

Heath: No. I wanted to do both [because] how is the inker going to know where the shadows go. You've got to put those in. And then some of the guys were even penciling in the areas, you know, or were having their kids do it, "Color this area here with this pencil." And that was so stupid. I said, "It takes you twenty minutes to pencil in a few inches. And if you had a brush, you'd go, whoop, whoop, and it's finished." Why do that? It made no sense to me, so I tried to always pencil and ink my own stuff. I would've colored it if there was any way to do that. But they said, "Oh, coloring, we have the guys take it home for their kids to color over the weekend, and you're too valuable to do *coloring*."

Ringgenberg: I know at Timely you worked on a lot of westerns. Was that by choice?

Heath: Well, I guess it was one of the [things I did]. I became known for my westerns and my war stuff, and my pretty girls and so on. And I guess the western stuff was…from being a kid, and my father's influence.

Ringgenberg: Now, when you were doing the westerns were you approaching the costuming and backgrounds and so forth more from a perspective of movie westerns, or were you trying to make it more authentic than that?

Heath: Well, I was always trying to make things more authentic. One of the big things in the early comic days was the time, you know, what they paid per page, and you had to get [the work] out…A guy that could do three pages a day was way ahead of a guy that could do two pages a day. And so, when you're trying to do it right, you're fighting in both directions. You're trying to do it very, very fast and get it out, and you're trying to do [quality]. That was what I always loved about Foster on *Prince Valiant*. He didn't have a daily. He just had the Sunday page for the whole week. He could take a day and a half to do each panel. That's like an illustrator.

Ringgenberg: Well, he really was more of an illustrator than a cartoonist, don't you think?

Heath: Oh yeah. I wouldn't even use the word cartoonist. I don't even like it for myself.

Ringgenberg: It doesn't really seem to describe what guys like you and Foster and Frazetta do. I mean, to me, a cartoonist is Jack Kirby. Some guy who can do everything. Tell me, Russ, do you have any Foster originals?

Heath: I would say I had no originals of anybody. I did have a couple of Milton Caniffs. They were autographed to me. I had never even met Caniff, but his assistants, who I got to meet, gave me a couple. I don't think there are a dozen originals that I've had from people. I just was not into collecting. I just heard today from the editor of one of the magazines that he had just bought a story that he had been trying to buy from me for years. I sold all my collection to the Heritage Auction House.

Ringgenberg: How many pages did you send over there?

Heath: I didn't send them. They came and got them….There were over nine hundred.

Ringgenberg: Was that everything you'd gotten back from DC over the years?

Heath: It was everything that I had from anywhere.

Ringgenberg: Nine hundred pages. That's a lot of art.

Heath: Yeah, it was kind of like cutting off my leg. That represented my career, or all I had of it. I never got rid of anything before. I'd sold a few odd pages. I think I started out with thirteen hundred, but selling them bit-by-bit you're going to end up with the second half nobody wants. They're all going to want the best stuff, and…I didn't want to spend my last years of my life trying to get rid of my collection. So, when I got an offer that I liked, they took everything out the door.

Ringgenberg: So, you sold it all as one lot?

Heath: Right.

Ringgenberg: Was it painful parting

with it?

Heath: A little bit. I should've kept a couple just to have a couple, but I thought what am I going to do? I'm going to take the very best story in the pile, and then they're not going to like that. So I said, heck, let it all go. They came up to the house, three of them, and then cataloged everything, and they wrote up contracts, and packaged it up and carried it off. And it's a tremendous relief, as I say. I don't have to worry about selling it now, or, let's say I die, and my kids get three dollars a page for it, thinking that's a big sale, you know. You don't want to turn it over to somebody who's not in the business and doesn't know what the pages are worth. They'd say, "Oh, boy, I can get twenty dollars a page for this stuff." Instead of two or three hundred.

One job, this guy…called to tell me about was five hundred a page. Of course he thought it was the top story that I ever did for Warren, and I guess there's a number of people that thought that.

Ringgenberg: Oh, was that the *Blazing Combat* job?

Heath: No, it was an African story.

Ringgenberg: Oh, right. I remember that story. I thought maybe you were talking about "Give and Take" for *Blazing Combat*.

Heath: No. If I'm not mistaken, was it Steranko has that? Somebody has that, the originals to that. I never got hold of those. Some guy called me and says, "I got them for you. I'll give them to you for what I paid for them, two hundred and something." And I said, "They belong to me. I don't want to buy them!" And so that was the end of that. So, I never saw them again. But recently, in the last three months, I heard that, I think, Steranko has them.

Ringgenberg: That was a great job, Russ.

Heath: Well, thank you. I set out to do a collector's item. And it took, instead of a week's work, it took about a month and a half, and of course, it cost me the time in income. But now and then you just have to do what you want to do, regardless.

Ringgenberg: When you were doing it, did you feel like you were succeeding in doing an extraordinary job on this one?

Heath: Well, all the guys who were slated to be in the book were all my peers, and the very best of them from EC—Wally Wood and John Severin, etc. So, I wanted to do a damn good story so I wouldn't look bad by comparison. So I took a bunch of photographs and I did a bunch of research and I bought stuff for the photographs and I had a *Playboy* photographer on a weekend when the office was closed, and we went down to the studios and shot forty pictures to work from for that story. And it certainly succeeded. I tried to hire somebody to help me when I broke my wrist, and I asked this guy to send over anybody he knew that I could make a deal with, that maybe I could give them lessons and some money, but I couldn't afford much then. So, he suggested this girl, I called her up and said, "This is Russ Heath," and she said, "Who?" It was like I had no idea if she'd know who I was. But she liked that *Blazing Combat* job so well that she carried it on her person at all times, had it in her valise with her wherever she went. And I came to realize that the ones that I had done like that people talked about, remembered. I did another one that I wrote called, "Easy's First Tiger." It started out with a big, double-page spread of the Tiger. I wanted to do the definitive Tiger tank so that nobody needed to bother to try to do that tank again.

Ringgenberg: Anyway, to get back to the old days when you were working for Stan Lee over at Timely. How did you like working with Stan's scripts, and the scripts from the other writers?

Heath: I don't remember them being much different from one to another. You know, I would just get into the story, and how am I going to tell this, and I wasn't very conscious in the very beginning as to *who* wrote it. And then of course, later, I found different writers, and Kanigher's scripts were quite different than most.

Ringgenberg: Did Kanigher work full script?

Heath: Yeah. I always worked full script, and of course Timely did too until many years after I'd stopped working for them, or a few years after I stopped working for them. I did one job for them, "Son of Satan," which was my first attempt to do something without a full script, and it was weird. I had to struggle with the first few pages because I didn't know how to do that, and I said, "Since they didn't tell me what to do, I can do anything I want." And I went crazy and it suddenly became fun.

Ringgenberg: You did some great monsters in that story. Did Foster's stuff or any of the great fantasy painters influence any of those creatures?

Heath: Well, there was Bruegel. There were a bunch of guys, you know, early artists of that era, of Bruegel's era. I can't remember the names of some of the other ones…

Ringgenberg: Bosch?

Heath: Yes. Hieronymous Bosch. I probably stole a few panels from him

and Virgil Finlay in the beginning—the first dozen years or so…and over at Timely, which was then Atlas. You never knew what book your story was going to be in. Of course, you knew if it was Kid Colt, it was going to be in the Kid Colt book. But on straight stories that didn't have a running hero, like the horror stories, they hadn't even been scheduled as to what book they were going into. I did try to find a copy of everything I ever did because I wanted to study the line and make sure the line was holding up and printing and wasn't too heavy, and trying to work for the reproduction. Kids will say, "Well, you remember issue number 93 of…?" Well, I never knew the issue number of any comic book story I did.

Ringgenberg: Did you manage to hang on to many of the comic books you worked on?

Heath: For a long time I saved everything. I bought these racks like they used to have in the stores, and I put them on my studio wall, and they became so jammed, I said that I couldn't put any more racks up.

Ringgenberg: Aside from DC and Timely, who else were you working for in the fifties?

Heath: Oh, God, there was a lot of little ones that came along that I did stuff for. I remember Gil Kane and I did a few books for Western Printing, western books. There was a run for a while of these silly books, you know, like *Crazy*. All the companies, the little ones especially, jumped on the bandwagon.

Ringgenberg: There were about fifty or sixty or more imitations of *MAD*. I know you worked for Kurtzman on the original *MAD*, so you also wound up working for some of the imitators?

Heath: I worked on *Cracked* magazine later, which was similar. Everybody and anybody. There were actually probably more. In '78, I started working for animation, I would say I worked for 75% of the animation studios, which was a much bigger percentage than the comic book thing, because there was a lot of comic book houses I never went to see, such as, what was the one that did *Dollman*?

Ringgenberg: Quality.

Heath: I never worked for them. I never worked for Charlton. It's just I never got around there, or I must have been too busy at the time that I could have gone.

Ringgenberg: Did you always have plenty of work?

Heath: Yeah, I think I've been out of

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THE GHOST OF THE DEEP!

work about a weekend in my career. (That's an exaggeration.)

Ringgenberg: Back in the fifties, when the pulps were still around, did you ever do any illustrations for those?

Heath: No. I didn't have any intro with anybody in the pulps.

Ringgenberg: But you have done comics and commercial art?

Heath: I did work for St. John when they were starting up the three-comic thing. They started, I think, with *Mighty Mouse*, and then they did *Tor* with Joe Kubert. In that first magazine, the first 3D *Tor* book, there's two pages of mine, guest pages that are totally mine, and then I worked on the backgrounds…through the book.

Ringgenberg: That's right. You did some dinosaur stuff. How was Joe Kubert to work with back then?

Heath: Great. Great. We became good friends, and we still are today.

Ringgenberg: Well, you and Joe have worked on a lot of magazines together, especially after he became an editor.

Heath: I was then living in Chicago, doing everything by mail for him. And right in the middle of it, I was out every night, hitting the bars, and partying and drinking and whatnot, so I would end up being quite late, and in those days they hadn't yet wised up to the idea to give false deadlines so that stuff comes in way before it's needed. Of course, there may have been other factors involved such as they may not have had as much inventory as they do now. In other words, once they paid for something, they wanted to get it into the book and get the money back. I don't know what's behind the scenes. So, Joe got rightfully very upset with my being very late, and I made big strides in my work at that time because I was trying to overcome being late by doing such a beautifully startling job, it would kind of nullify my being late.

Ringgenberg: How often did you succeed?

Heath: Well, it's just that…when I stopped working for *Playboy*, I had no input. There were no artists there. I saw no artwork. There was no input whatsoever, and so I was just literally working for a check by mail. I remember one

time he said, "If I had you here in New York right now, I'd punch you right in the face." Now I'm sure I deserved it, but I don't think he would have actually done that. But he was trying to get across how superbly frustrated he was at me. I'd come up with these tales that he was pretty sure were half-lies. He did a little story, in fact, and stuck me into it, that he called me while he was being an editor after he worked all night, he called me up in Chicago, and I'm in a tuxedo partying with girls and stuff in the Playboy image and, "Yeah, I've been up all night. Yeah, Joe, I'm working my ass off. I'm almost done with it."

Ringgenberg: When you were working for DC, I know you were mostly concentrating on the war stuff, but did you do any westerns for them?

Heath: I don't think I did a western for DC. I can't recall it if I did. Working just for Kanigher, he didn't have any western books. But I did the *Golden Gladiator*, the *Silent Knight*. I did *Robin Hood*. Those were all his books, and then of course, *Sgt. Rock* and then the *Haunted Tank*.

Ringgenberg: You were on the *Haunted Tank* for many years.

Heath: I did more *Rock* than *Haunted Tank*. I'm always amazed. I run into people now and then that get Joe's work and my work confused. And I find that hard to believe, because we are so opposite of each other in our styles. I draw everything literally and finish it with all the nuts and bolts, and he does these beautiful, lyrical, much more sketchy types of things, that works for him, you know, like Frazetta. Nobody can be Frazetta. And nobody can be Joe. I think Joe's had a few people ink him and I don't think anybody's ever inked him as well as he inks his own.

Ringgenberg: I agree. Other people just can't get it.

Heath: I tried to ape him on the first couple of *Sgt. Rocks*. I didn't really try to ape him; I tried to move my style a little bit towards his so the shock to the reader wouldn't be [so great]. I didn't want to…get everybody turned against it or something. So then I drifted back about the third story towards my own way of doing it.

Ringgenberg: Well, even though you were working in your own style, you always made Rock look the way Joe did.

Heath: Well, you can't really change the character.

Ringgenberg: Right. But I mean, given the difference in your styles, I thought it was pretty amazing that this

was still recognizably the same person.

Heath: Then I was successful. I did a four-page story a few years ago on Sgt. Rock and I looked back and I hadn't drawn him for twenty years. To be sure that I was getting it absolutely right, I had to get a couple of magazines out and bring myself back up to speed on it.

Ringgenberg: When you were working for Kanigher you also did that series for *Star Spangled War* with the soldiers fighting dinosaurs.

Heath: Oh, yeah. Right.

Ringgenberg: What did you think about those stories when you were doing them?

Heath: Well, at the time I was doing them I thought it was really stupid because dinosaurs were gone so far before man was around, and it seemed silly to me. Not only was it not real…, it seemed silly. So I didn't even research any of the monsters, I just made them up. And yet, time has proved me [wrong] you know, people loved that stuff. And I was amazed. Or I am now amazed that people thought so much of it. I would've made better monsters had I known. Some of the coloring was ridiculous. I did a couple of re-creations of covers from that series. They'd have these puce or some modernistic color, purpley or cerise, or some weird colors. Had I been serious, I'd have made some effort to try to get them to do something that looked a little less like a rubber toy.

Ringgenberg: Even when you weren't doing westerns, were you still interested in westerns, as far as like movies?

Heath: Well, I think I was mainly known over the years for the high action.

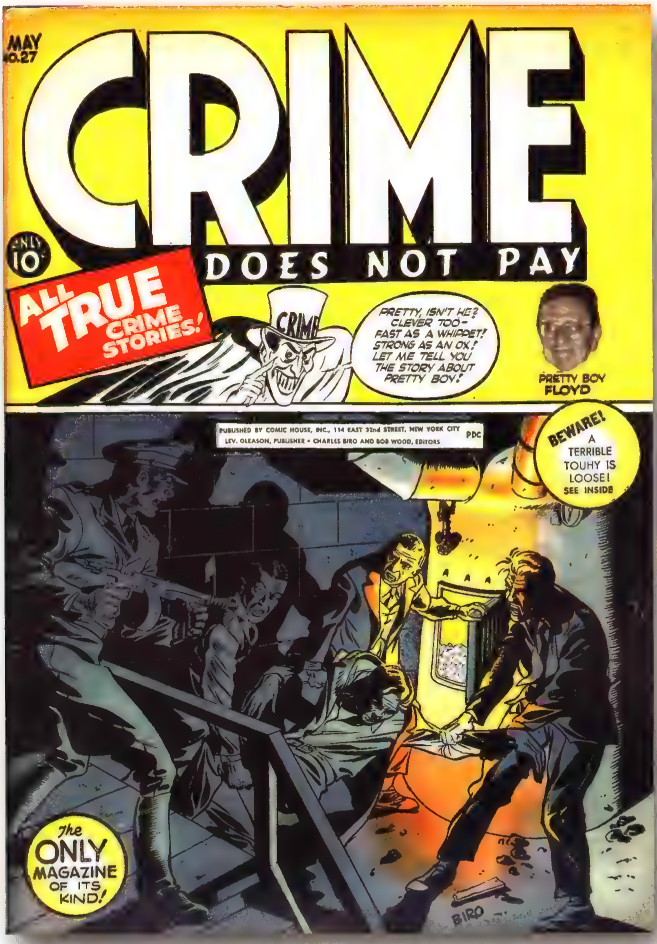
Ringgenberg: So, what prompted you finally to do the *Lone Ranger* strip?

Heath: What got me to do that? I don't remember who called me on that. It might have been John Severin. I think they approached Gil Kane, and Gil Kane, when he found he couldn't get the originals back, turned it down. But I think it was, maybe he phoned John, and John phoned. You know there're not very many western experts around.

Ringgenberg: This is true, especially these days.

Heath: Well, at that particular time.

[continued on page 80]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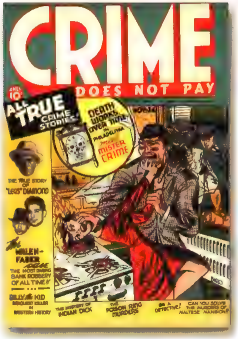
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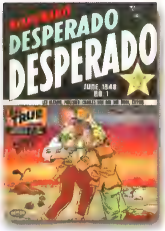
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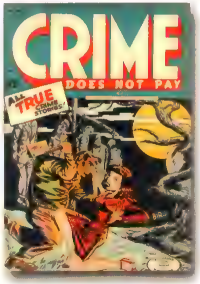
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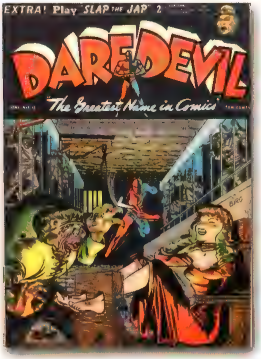
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Lev Gleason and Co.

by Michael Feldman

Today, outside of comic collectors and those interested in the history of the medium, there are very few people who have ever encountered the name Lev Gleason. He was a Golden Age publisher, a highly enigmatic and controversial figure, who commandeered one of the most successful comic publishing operations in the industry's first decade.

While fans have extensively chronicled his company's various comic character creations, and the careers of the contributing artists and writers are documented, little information has come down to us as to how and why Gleason appears as a key figure in the world of American comics, mysteriously materializing on the publishing scene in the '30s, assuming the reins of a highly successful outfit in the '40s, and equally mysteriously disappearing from sight in the '50s.

We might start with what little is available in the public record. From the Social Security Deaths Registry, we have this uninformative entry:

LEVERETT GLEASON
SSN 059-03-3291
02631 Brewster, Barnstable, MA
Born 25 Feb 1898
Died Sep 1971
Issued: NY (Before 1951)

Gleason's name does show up frequently in newspapers in the '40s and '50s, but nothing beyond. A quick check of the 1920 US Census, tells us that there was someone named Leverett Stone Gleason who provided information in 1918. But a survey of the 1971 New York Times and Boston newspapers does not turn up an obituary for him.

Certainly a wealth of information is available on the town of Brewster, in the County of Barnstable, Massachusetts. The adjacent seaside area around Cape Cod has always been a popular and picturesque setting inhabited and frequented primarily by the upper stratum of Eastern Seaboard society. One can call it a watering hole for the rich. How did Gleason end up there? Did he die at the home of his children, perhaps in poverty? Did he become so wealthy as a publisher that he decided to retire in his 50s?

The meager indicators on hand point to some kind of success. Unlike virtually all of his fellow comics entrepreneurs, Gleason disappears completely from the publishing world. There is no attempt to maintain or renew the trademarks

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and copyrights that he owned. When comics become somewhat respectable again, in the '60s, he makes no attempt to seek any kind of recognition or monetary benefit.

Gleason is much more than just someone who made a quick buck with comics and moved on. A check of various newspapers that were issued during his career reveals an ongoing involvement in many contentious and politically charged activities throughout the Forties. For one thing, an unusual number of lawsuits were initiated against him personally and his publishing partners, sometimes in tandem with investigations of their political affiliations. In turn, Gleason and his cohorts initiated a number of counter suits, against his numerous and surprisingly well-positioned opponents.

Lev Gleason's profile differs on almost all counts from his peers, most of whom rose through the ranks of cheap girlie magazines and lurid pulp publishing, before discovering a niche in the comic book boom of the '40s and early '50s.

Not too many people, on any level of media activities, within the pages of their own publications, took on the likes of William Randolph Hearst and Henry Ford, particularly while in the process of launching a line of comic books. Few people would dare to print something that accused people of this stature of being pro-Fascist, Hitler sympathizers, anti-Semites or abusers of child-labor laws, particularly in the US, in the politically sensitive 1940s.

Gleason first appears on the publishing industry horizon as the advertising manager of *The Open Road for Boys* in 1931. The magazine, perhaps not coincidentally started in Boston (in 1919), was a popular Boy Scout endorsed publication that was particularly fond of cartoons and comic strips. During Gleason's tenure on the magazine, a number of later notable comic book artists made contributions to the magazine.

Within its pages, there was a contest that ran regularly, which accepted and awarded contributions from youngsters who mailed in their amateur cartooning efforts. In 1931, two of the winners, still high school age, were Vince Alascia and Jack Cole. Perhaps just by sheer coincidence, Cole was to become the star artist and initial editor of the comics line Gleason was to control by the end of the decade.

Gleason is next visible working in a sales capacity for Eastern Color Printing, an established operation with offices in New York City. For decades, Eastern Color printed the comic sections for a number of newspapers, including the *Boston Globe*, the *Brooklyn Times*, the *Providence Journal* and the *Newark Ledger*. Some claim that another of Gleason's comrades in the same sales department, Harry Wildenberg, invented the modern comic format. I've always wondered how something that was, and had been, the standard for mass-market publishing for many decades (the 7- by 10-inch saddle stitched magazine) could be considered new and revolutionary.

Nevertheless, Eastern Color, and its 1934 10-cent newsstand comic book, *Famous Funnies*, is considered the first modern comic book. Comprised of reprinted newspaper strip, *Famous Funnies* and its successors initiated a whole new sector of American publishing that is still with us 70 years later.

The name Leverett Gleason appears in print in the indicia of one of the first new comic titles in 1936. *Tip Top Comics*, composed of feature newspaper strips from the Scripps-Howard-owned United Feature Syndicate, has Gleason listed as its first editor. He would have been given the responsibility of selecting and assembling the material for this pioneering comic package. In 1936 only a handful of people had any familiarity with the new genre format and its technical requirements. The immediate market advantages of *Tip Top* were a stellar line up of popular strips which included the classic Hal Foster-drawn *Tarzan* and Al Capp's brilliant *Li'l Abner*, along with less well-remembered features.

We next encounter Gleason involved with a company calling itself, variably, "Your Guide" and "Astro Distribution Corp." Their small lineup includes *Astrology*

Guide and *Popular Psychology Guide*. Were they around today, they would be called a New Age publishing house. The company is co-owned by partners Arthur Bernhard and Morris Lutzen.

In the Fall of 1939, a new comic book, *Silver Streak Comics*, hit the stands, from an outfit with an imprint "Rhoda Publications." Silver Streak is the model of Bernhard's new car, and Rhoda is the name of Lutzen's daughter. Appearing on the stands at the tail end of the '30s, this is just another one of a torrent of new titles from novice comic publishers trying to capitalize on the phenomenal success of Harry Donenfeld and Paul Sampliner's *Action Comics*, which put Superman and the original comic book on the mass media map in 1938.

With the closure of Europe to most exported American products, including printed matter, the late '30s are a critical time for many publishers bringing product to the newsstands. The pulp magazines are on their last legs, and the competition is fierce. Finding something to put on paper that has appeal (and that doesn't involve major capital expenditures) becomes more and more difficult. Casual visitors to the newsstand start seeing increasingly lurid covers and pulps containing disturbing horror stories, often with strong S&M components. The pulp

industry is thrashing in its death throes. The first thing abandoned is good taste. Anything goes.

Many of the newest generation of low-rent district publishers, aggregating in mid-town Manhattan, with few resources at their disposal, had fallen into a comfortable niche, churning out what we benignly now call soft porn. Innocuous by today's standards, these girlie mags, often with nude photographs interspersed between racy stories, had become a reliable income source for a dozen different low-budget operations. They were cheap to produce, sold somewhere in the range of 60-70% of their print runs, and were in great demand in the more innocent hinterlands across the country. Later comics producers like DC, Fawcett, and Ace were actively involved in this field.

In the case of DC Comics, they were the foundation of a publishing and distributing empire that remains the major force in the worldwide comics market. But by the '30s, things were in a definite downswing. There were too many of them, and audiences were getting tired of shelling out quarters for the same old thing. The glut of sordid magazines, being sold above and below the counter, was also being slowly eradicated by zealous censors, city officials and the Post Office.

Pulp magazines were giving way to more popular newsstand fare, including slicker magazines, 'true' stories, and detective mags. Comic books looked like they had a future, but a problem for these minimal budget companies catering to the low end of the market was a lack of affordable and available new material to print. The newspaper syndicates had either contracted their best material with semi-respectable companies, or entered into the marketplace themselves. But there were enterprising small outfits springing up, dedicated to providing new comic material through sweatshop setups.

Arthur Bernhard, Morris Lutzen and Lev Gleason, who later assumed the reins of the operation, were an enterprising assembly of novice publishers who gravitated to comics in the wake of Superman's immediate success on the American newsstand. In a period when many publishers were struggling to sell even 50,000 copies of anything they could put together, *Action Comics* and *Detective Comics* were regularly generating sales levels more than ten times that number. Comics looked like they were developing rapidly into the next hot thing.

Gleason, though he published autonomously after 1941, maintained some kind of co-operative relationship with Bernhard and Lutzen for the rest of the decade. Bernhard's publishing roots are traceable to the wild and wooly days of the late '20s and early '30s, with a periodical distribution company called Eastern

ACTION-PACKED THRILLING ADVENTURE!
DAREDEVIL
SILVER
STREAK
COMICS
No. 15
OCTOBER
10¢
Closer and closer came the outstretched claws of the shrouded Zombi. Jane's scream pierced the clammy catacombs of the tomb. Can Capt. Battle and Hale save her from a horrible death?
See page 4
Featuring a New Feature
THE BUNCH OF BOBS

Distribution, which was managed, owned and operated in a partnership by *Detective Comics*' co-publisher and distributor, Paul Sampliner. The company's main clients included arch crank visionary, Hugo Gernsback, of early broadcast and electronics publishing. He is remembered today mostly for his *Amazing Stories*, started in 1926. Also there were Harry Donenfeld and Frank Armer's risqué girlie mags, with evocative names like *Spicy* and *Pep*. Eastern Distribution, until its demise in 1932, was a wellspring for virtually a whole generation of Golden Age comic publishing personnel. Working as circulation managers and advertising sales people were the future publishers of a number of comic companies that are still with us today—like Marvel, DC and Archie Comics.

Bernhard and Lutzen were established members of New York's lower echelon of ephemeral publishing, and would carve their own niche with lines of particularly outrageous true detective magazines, and reverting to form, would branch off into men's magazines and sleazy paperbacks—a popular venue for that reliable staple, soft porn.

Along with their fellow publishing bottom feeders such as Martin Goodman, of Marvel fame, and Louis Silberkleit, partner in the company that would give us Archie, Bernhard and Lutzen take timid steps as a comic publisher. *Silver Streak* hit North American newsstands sometime in the fall of 1939, side by side with *Marvel Comics* #1 and the less-remembered *Blue Ribbon Comics*, which utilized Silberkleit's new pulp-

DAREDEVIL
10¢
JULY
NO. 1
BATTLES
HITLER
The most TERRIFYING BATTLE ever waged—HITLER stacked the cards against humanity—BUT—DAREDEVIL deals the ACE OF DEATH to the MAD MERCHANT OF HATE!—
WOODRO

EXTRA! Play "SLAP THE JAP" 2 FREE VERSION OF SENSATIONAL NEW GAME SEE INSIDE!
DARE DEVIL
"The Greatest Name in Comics"
JUNE NO. 11
TEN CENT
PUBLISHED BY COMIC HOUSE, INC., 114 E. 32nd ST., NEW YORK CITY
LEV. GLEASON, PUBLISHER - CHARLES BIRO AND BOB WOOD EDITORS
BIRO

producing corporate name. An interesting bit of trivia is the fact that *Silver Streak* initially carried a full-page ad for Goodman's *Marvel*, while there is also an ad in *Marvel* for *Silver Streak*.

Even by the primitive standards of the earliest original Golden Age comics, of late 1939-40 vintage, Bernhard/Lutzen's fledgling comic book, while perhaps historically significant, is a fiasco, creatively. The odd assortment of ungainly characters separating the Cole-created and cover-featured The Claw, might lead one to believe that they wandered into the sweatshop of second tier comics studio owner, Harry "A" Chesler, and asked for whatever he had, that he could buy—cheap! At one point Chesler affiliated himself with the Lev Gleason line under the name "Magazine Press." The Gleason connection to Chesler is one of "shared" publishing, thus the "imprint." Maybe Chesler was testing the waters to see if he could make a quick entry into the burgeoning market in 1939. Not too much later, Chesler entered the publishing business for another time. It was short-lived. There is some speculation that Chesler may have had an established publishing operation, like MacFadden, sponsoring his brief 1941 attempts.

Jack Cole is listed as the comic line's first editor for "Your Guide" in 1939-40 after working in Chesler's shop from 1937 to 1939. His Claw appears in the first two issues of *Silver Streak* and disappears for two more. Thing start to improve noticeably by the sixth issue. My guess is that tepid sales returns, or maybe the direct intervention of Gleason and Cole, precipitate a more concerted effort to win an audience in later issues, as it becomes apparent that not everything done in comics form is flying off the stands.

I'll leave it to others to analyze and diagnose the rise to acceptable standards and the development of more commercial features that transpired in the company's first few issues in 1940. What transpires in the background is that, in this period, two of Chesler's star performers, Charles Biro and Bob Wood, are made offers they couldn't refuse to jump ship and work directly for the publisher that their shop was packaging material for.

Cole is gone within a year, moving on to greener pastures, which translates to better paying work. He ends up at Quality, and is responsible for an artistic landmark with his *Plastic Man*. Bernhard and Lutzen bail out, as sales are not as rosy as they had hoped, at least not immediately. Biro stays on as an artist, and ultimately becomes the editorial and writing force that escalates the company's output to stratospheric levels of sales, with titles approaching the million per issue mark, in the late '40s.

There is some change of hands, we have some contemporary indication from the trade press of something important happening in early 1941. The March 1941 issue of *Writers' Digest* announces "Your Guide" has gone out of business. This brings a written reply from "Your Guide" spokesman, Jules Saltman, saying this is not the case. In point of fact, they are expanding their operation, but in the process, two titles have been sold to Daniel S. Gillmor of New Friday Publications. One is *Silver Streak* and the other is *Popular Psychology Guide*. Also mentioned is that new publisher Gillmor is adding two new comic book titles. And sure enough, debuting in 1941 are *Daredevil*, now graduated to his own title, and a new patriotic superhero, Captain Battle.

Lev Gleason emerges from the shadows at this juncture. Probably a junior partner, he is officially listed as the company's Treasurer. Gillmor and Gleason and their company, New Friday, were extremely unusual for new entrants into the comics business. Unlike their contemporaries, as we shall see, they had an agenda over and above simply making money by converting paper in publications.

But who is Dan Gillmor, and where did he come from? From a variety of published sources, including contemporary newspapers, including the sedate New York *Times*, we know this: Dan Gillmor was given a one million dollar line of credit by a consortium of investors to make a significant entry into the world of American publishing. This just as the War was developing in Europe, in 1938-39. It appears that Gillmor was chosen by these investors, most likely a group of high-minded and concerned members of New

CRIME
DOES NOT PAY
ONLY 10¢
ALL TRUE CRIME STORIES!
DEATH WORKS OVER TIME IN PHILADELPHIA meet MISTER CRIME
NOV. 24
THE TRUE STORY OF "LEGS" DIAMOND
The MILLEN-FABER case
THE MOST DARING BANK ROBBERY OF ALL TIME!!
BILLY the KID
DEADLIEST KILLER IN WESTERN HISTORY
THE MYSTERY OF INDIAN DICK
THE POISON RING MURDERS
BE A DETECTIVE!
CAN YOU SOLVE THE MURDERS OF MALTESE MANSION?
BIRO

York's Jewish community, who wanted their personal political beliefs to be given a viable forum. They are motivated by a need to stem the tide of Fascism, anti-labor, and anti-Semitism that was growing in the media in this period. The Left wanted attention for their concerns, at the very least, to balance the Rightist views of the monopolies that controlled the majority of newspapers and magazines. These concerns included the constitutional rights of Jews and other minorities, as well as the millions of disenfranchised Americans who had increasingly become economic pawns to the bankers and businessmen who were determined to keep them in political and economic abeyance.

To put it mildly, Daniel S. Gillmor was not your average quick-buck-artist, low-end-of-the-market publisher. He was an outspoken political radical, champion of the disenfranchised and driven defender of causes. And he was the first unashamed Communist comic book publisher.

Communism is a loaded word in today's politically polarized world. In the context of the Great Depression that gripped the world in the '30s, and was still evident in the US until its entry into WW2, the alternatives to free-rein capitalist Democracy, like Communism and Socialism, were considered by millions of Americans to be realistic alternatives of government systems that represented fairer and more equitable relationships between governments and the people. Millions of Americans had formed the opinion that unbridled capitalism was the primary cause of the economic deprivation that the vast majority of the population had been forced to endure for more than a decade.

The Communists were taking incessant criticism from the largely right wing press, and things for publishers of any leftist affiliations became very hairy with the passing

of the Smith Act in 1940. This Act of Congress, designed as a deterrent to anyone even considering another form of government, made it a serious offense "to print, publish, edit, issue, circulate, sell, distribute, or publicly display any written or printed matter advocating, advising, or

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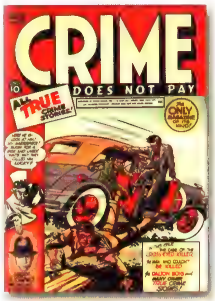
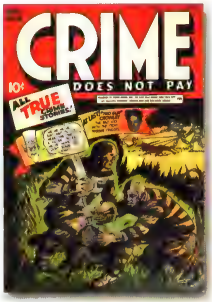
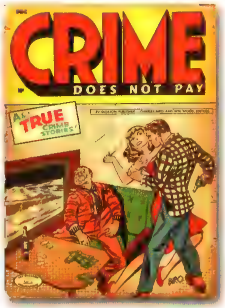






WHO THE

by Will Murray

It was back around 1964-65, as near as I can recall. Following a two-year flirtation with DC, I succumbed to the lure of Marvel Comics. Old comics issues were tough to come by, so any opportunity to acquire scarce early comics was to be seized.

My father used to take me to his longtime barber in his old neighborhood. One day that stopped and I was instead going alone to a barbershop around the corner.

I'll never forget rummaging through the pile of old *Life*s and *Time*s and *Saturday Evening Post*s on a big table and discovering that Joe the Barber had old comic books.

Really old ones.

There was a 1953 *Batman*, a coverless *Fighting American*, one *Airboy* and one oddity from a publisher I had never heard of, Lev Gleason. The book was called *Boy Illustories*, and the cover showed a kid in a red and blue hockey uniform playing—what else?—hockey. I was not into hockey, but thumbing through the book, I discovered that things were not what they seemed. This stick wizard fought crime, too.

HECK WAS C.B.?

I bartered for this rare pile of comics, unloading some unwanted new DC's I recall. A fair enough swap back then, but highway robbery now. I still have that book today, although its cover long since fell away in tatters, so it's possible to relive my first encounter with *Boy Illustories*.

What a strange and puzzling experience it was, too. For one thing, although he appeared in three separate stories in *Boy* #50 (Feb 1949), never once did writer Charles Biro refer to the hockey player by name. He was just C.B. I scratched my 11-year old head over that one. Was C.B. his civilian initials, or an abbreviation for his crime-fighting name? For that matter, did he even *have* a crime-fighting name? C.B.'s red hockey jersey was no help. It was emblazoned with a big blue C. Was that the name of his team? If so, where were they?

The stories were pretty interesting. For someone in the thrall of the newly-emergent Marvel Universe, I found C.B.'s exploits oddly compelling. No huge fights. No supervillains. Not a mutant or Norse god in sight. Only human interest tales of a type 1960s comics simply didn't do, or had forgotten how.

C.B.
C.B.'S MIRACLE
A MOST UNUSUAL STORY! YOU'LL FIND IT HARD TO BELIEVE UNLESS YOU'RE A GOOD GUY WITH A BIG HEART!
STORY BY CHARLES BIRO
YEAH!
MERRY CHRI
Charles Biro

"C.B.'s Miracle" was a heart-warming Christmas story. Harry and Kay are in love, but their lives take a strange turn when, while withdrawing company Christmas party funds from the bank, an anonymous philanthropist gives Kay a fur coat and Harry a new watch. Their good fortune turns sour after a crook robs Harry of the cash. Things don't go well for the crook when a cop innocently sits next to him on his getaway train. The panicked crook throws the money out the window, where a blind kid finds it. The money ends up as a holiday windfall for the Reeves Home for Blind Children. The news for Harry is not so merry. He's in the jug on suspicion of buying that watch and coat with the office funds. Enter C.B. who's hanging around the courthouse with his friend, District Attorney Loover. Deciding Harry looks innocent, C.B. begins sleuthing for the mystery philanthropist, who when told of Harry's misfortune, decides to cater the office party and give Harry a new car to boot.

"Who says there's no Santa Claus?" asks a vindicated Harry.

The story was signed Charles Biro, with art by Norman Maurer. I had never read anything like it. Not a single punch was thrown. They sure lived differently back in 1949.

"The Most Hated Hockey Coach" finds C.B. involved in the murder of a detested hockey coach at Polar Lake's Winter Sports Carnival. He's mysteriously shot in his hotel room as a parade goes by. Aided by his pet monkey Squeeks, C.B. figures out who shot the hated coach from a parade float, clears an innocent party once again, and then suits up to help the Polar Stars win the All-Star game. Try to imagine Captain America polishing off the Red Skull and celebrating by helping the Giants win the Super bowl.

If the word surreal had been in my vocabulary back then, I would have whistled it. Instead, I read the last story hoping to learn the identity of C.B. No such luck.

"The Big Bet" is the tale of two brothers, one industrious, the other a loafer, who bet that whoever can turn 500 bucks into the biggest pile fastest gets to propose to Nancy, whom they both love. I don't have to tell you the loafer loses, do I? The twist is that, offended at being reduced to the stakes in a wager, Nancy decides to marry neither one of them. C.B. pops up late in the story when one brother is kidnapped and held for ransom in what might be a mere ploy to wring some cash from the wealthy father.

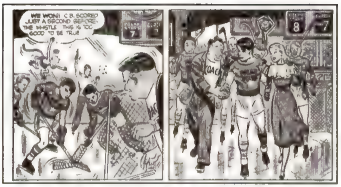
If it wasn't annoying enough that C.B. remained just a set of initials in a

hockey suit, I was left puzzling over the mystery of Daredevil, a character mentioned in a text feature and in the letters column, who sounded like he might be some kind of pre-Matt Murdock superhero. He hung around with a kid group called the Wise Guys. I would have given anything to have seen the Gleason Daredevil, who for all I knew back then was a race car driver.

A year or so later another issue of *Boy* bubbled up from Joe the Barber's pile of magazines—#86 (Dec 1953). It probably went on sale when I was six months old. A lot had changed. A shifty character named Iron Jaw had the cover and lead spot. Assisted by a comical thug named Sniffer, Iron Jaw struck me as more bad guy than good guy, as he tried to claim a fortune hidden at the top of Mt. Neverest. I couldn't fathom how or why he'd become the new star of *Boy*.

C.B. had the second spot in a true crime-style story in which he barely appeared. Clearly his fortunes had fallen drastically. While he still had his trademark jersey, ordinary slacks replaced the rest of C.B.'s outfit. Even his blue cape was gone. The book was rounded out by an unmemorable Science Fiction strip featuring Rocky X of the Rocketeers.

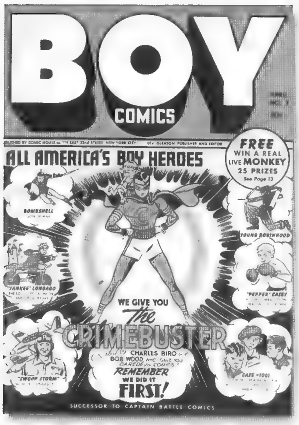
Boy #86 was pretty tired stuff compared to #50. But it did solve one mystery: C.B. called himself Crimebuster. There was no sign of Daredevil.

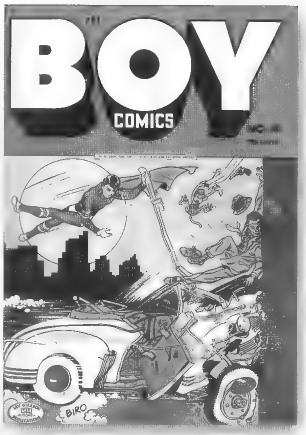


Many years passed before I discovered that C. B. was a boy military cadet student named Chuck Chandler who became Crimebuster to avenge the death of his parents at the hands of the Nazis, and Iron Jaw was his Nazi arch-foe. Adding a cape to his school hockey uniform rounded out his new identity. Daredevil turned out to be a boomerang-throwing 1940s superhero who inspired Marvel's version, at least in name.

By the time I had a handle on it all, it was no longer possible to swap barbers for their old comics and evade prosecution. Which is too bad. *Boy* made a big impression on me. As an antidote to raging Marvelmania, it was unbeatable.

AMERICA'S GREATEST LAUGH GETTER!
BOY
ILLUSTRATED
3 FEATURE-LENGTH THRILLER STORIES
HEY, IRON JAW! YOU CAN LET GO NOW!
I'D BREAK MY NECK, YOU IDIOT!
THAT COULDN'T HAPPEN TO A NICER GUY!
CHARLES BIRO





Not long ago, I came across a cheap coverless copy of *Boy* #74 (Feb 1952) in a bargain bin. Impelled by old memories, I snapped it up. The issue contained three plot-crammed Crimebuster tales. They were a lot more violent that I expected. In "Iron Jaw's Rampage of Danger" Crimebuster and Loover battle Iron Jaw until he's finally caught and sent to the Death House. In "Death Bait" Iron Jaw breaks jail and tries to polish off C.B. once and for all. He fails. The Williams and Overgard-drawn story actually ends with the police laying siege to the metal-mouthed monster's hideout. Why Biro insisted on putting "The End" in the last panel I will never know or understand. This was only a chapter break.

"Monkey Trouble" picks up from where the previous story leaves off, but is drawn by Norman Maurer. It's practically a farce. Escaping tear gas bombs, Iron Jaw dons a gorilla suit and tries hiding out in a circus. Squeeks the monkey unmasks him with a well-timed bite, after which Iron Jaw and Crimebuster duke it out in a brewery. "Shovel-face" (as Biro styled him) ends up in a beer vat. By the time he's hauled out, Iron Jaw's singing "Sweet Adeline" as he's marched staggering off to the Death House—probably not for the last time. It was a strange postwar career for a hardened Nazi.

Near the end of *Boy*'s run, Crimebuster stopped calling himself that, becoming ordinary Chuck Chandler to the end of his days, which came in 1956. The new Comics Code forbade use of the word crime, even in the context of a hero busting it. Maybe he should have called himself, Nazibuster. Well, that wouldn't have helped, would it?

They sure don't do comic books like this anymore. *Boy* belonged to a more innocent time, where people were just people and hockey players were clean-cut and could moonlight as heroes. The object of the game was more innocent, too. It wasn't pounding the poo out of this month's superfoe, but something simpler: clearing the innocent by establishing the guilty culprit.

Artist Bob Fujitani used to say that back in the '40s when *Daredevil* and *Boy* were selling millions of copies a month, Stan Lee would call up Charles Biro and ask, "What's the secret, Charlie?"

Biro would never reveal it. To his colleagues, he'd remark, "That poor guy, he wants to know the secret. There's no secret. The secret is Charlie Biro."

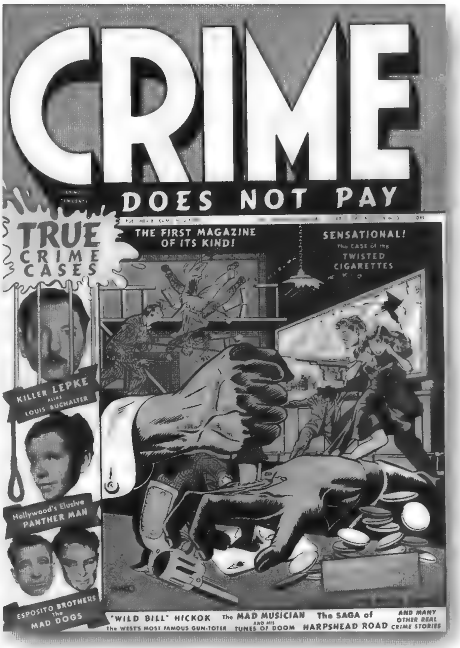
As an artist, as a writer, and as an editor, Charles Biro spoke directly to his audience in a language they could understand. And he signed his name to every story.

Stan Lee eventually figured that part out. But there was a deeper secret to the phenomenal success of Biro's postwar comics. According to Biro, it was simple: "You have to think like a kid."

'Nuff said.

CRIME? DOES NOT PAY

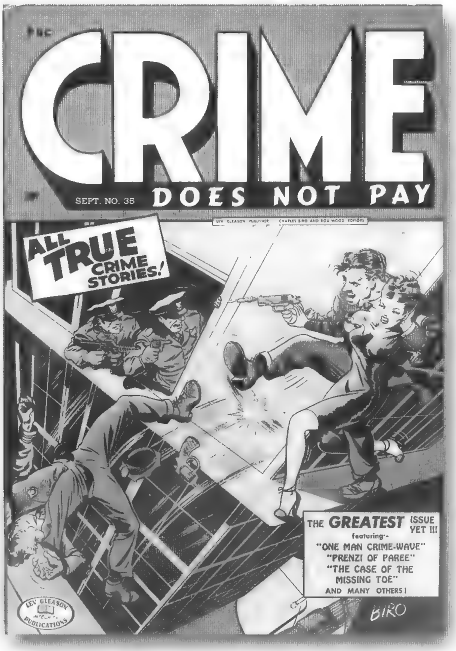
Excerpted from *Comic Book Makers* by Joe Simon with Jim Simon, Vanguard Publications. Copyright © 1990 & 2003 Joe Simon and Jim Simon.


CRIME
DOES NOT PAY
TRUE CRIME CASES
THE FIRST MAGAZINE OF ITS KIND!
SENSATIONAL! The CASE of the TWISTED CIGARETTES
KILLER LEPKE aces LOUIS BUCHALTER
Hollywood's Elusive PANTHER MAN
ESPOSITO BROTHERS The MAD DOGS
"WILD BILL" HICKOK The WEST'S MOST FAMOUS GUN-TOTER
The MAD MUSICIAN and HIS TUNES OF DOOM
The SAGA of HARPSHEAD ROAD
AND MANY OTHER REAL CRIME STORIES

Charlie Biro and Creig Flessel had been working all day on a ten-page comic book feature on Jesse James. They had almost forgotten the dinner hour, but finally the job was finished and they left the studio in search of a good eating place in which to relax. The flamboyant Biro wasn't the type to frequent dull or cheap joints. He led Creig to Armando's Hi-De-Ho Club in the East 50s. Hi-De-Ho was a phrase made popular by Big Band leader Cab Calloway, but that was as far as the relationship to the black singer went. Armando's was an intimate, softly lighted supper club with a clientele that Creig characterized as "unsavory." At the club, Biro soon caught the eye of a buxom showgirl type sitting at a nearby table. She was dining with a wide, muscular, swarthy man who bulged in the places where a gun could be trying to hide. The girl was returning Biro's winks, and Creig shuddered. Soon, the couple arose to leave. The wide man pushed past the table of the two artists, almost knocking Biro over. Flessel restrained Biro. It wasn't difficult.

Charlie Biro should have been in show business.

He was always the first to admit it, and we all agreed that he had what it took. In 1941, he was in his early twenties, over six feet tall, slim and athletic, a shock of



red hair topping off a flush complexion.

His blue eyes fixed in a constant squint, Charlie was always proposing ideas for new titles to anyone who would listen, especially a "money man" or publisher. Charlie was an artist with a style halfway between adventure (illustrative) and cartoon. As an artist, he would most likely not have made a great impression in the world of comic books. But Charlie was also a writer and, as it turned out, a comic book editor whose products later proved to be very successful.

Creig Flessel, a year or two older than Biro, was one of the best artists in the business. He had been around from the very beginning, longer than all of us. Creig had drawn the first Sandman before Simon and Kirby revamped the character for DC Comics. As Flessel would later tell it, the two were anxious to finish the meal and go home, when a flabby, limp-eyed man, seated at a corner table, nodded at the waiter.

The waiter scowled at the pair. Then he looked back to the flabby man. Obviously, the man was well known at Armando's. The man got up to approach them. Now standing, he was short, well dressed, nervous.

"You looking for a girl?" he stuttered to Biro.

Biro was taken aback.

"I've got a beauty upstairs, in my room. Come on."

An adventurer at heart, Biro played along. "What are you, some kind of pimp?"

"It won't cost you a cent," the short man said. "I just want to watch."

Biro shuddered as he declined. The two artists paid the check and left. The next day, Flessel excitedly brought the morning newspaper up to the studio. On the front page was the little man's picture. It was identified as Mickey Jelke. The headline read: "Police nab Oleo Margarine Heir in kidnapping." Mickey Jelke, the man at Armando's, was accused of holding a woman in bondage.

Charlie Biro scanned the story, fascinated. "Can you see a story like this in a comic book?" he exclaimed. "A book about weirdos and gangsters—it could go on forever." In a Broadway tavern, Biro ventured his thoughts about a crime comic to artist Bob Wood. Wood was an extremely mild man. He would periodically show up bruised and battered from encounters with loan sharks who were disappointed by his payment plan. Bob never fought back. He was a hard drinking man who found solace in the interesting bars along the Great White Way. Sometimes he persuaded Charlie Biro to join him. Charlie was an extrovert who drank to meet people, especially on Broadway where one was likely to run into a celebrity, or at least someone in radio or the press. Together, their ideas glowed like sapphires over the alcoholic spirits and, then and there, they pledged a partnership that would last over a decade and bring in a

million dollars of publishing profits, most of the money, in the custom of the business, going to the publishers.

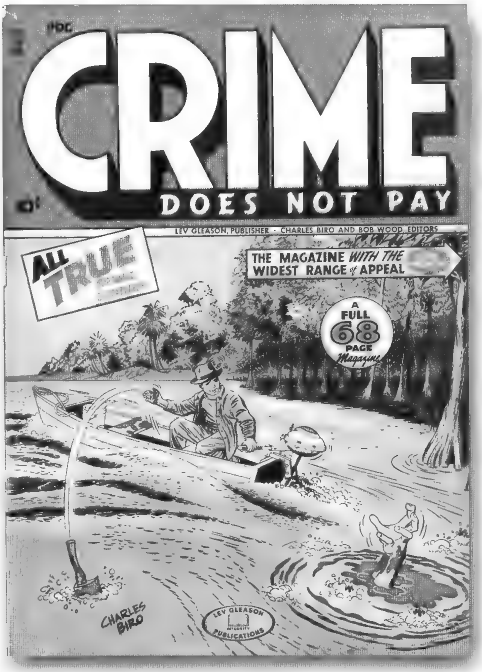
Bob Wood was a cartoonist of minor abilities. But he must have added valuable talents to the team, because together they prospered where each alone had been ordinary. They put together a comic book package entitled CRIME, in huge letters. Much smaller, underneath, were the words "Does Not Pay," a cop-out aimed not at the youthful consumers, but at parents who were beginning to organize small local rumblings against violence in comics.

The stories centered on true crime cases, told in dramatic detail with more and smaller art panels, heavier dialogue and a new look, inasmuch as the usual black shading was eliminated completely to accommodate more color. They sold the package on a royalty basis to Lev Gleason, a small book and paperback publisher. Gleason financed and published the comic book while Biro and Wood hired the best artists and writers available to them. Biro rounded out packages like a Broadway producer, testing and polishing the dialogue and seeking the most dramatic scenes. One of his steady artists, Alphonse Bare, related stories of Biro banging his head against the wall when a particular scene did not meet his demands. Knowing Charlie, we suspect it was all for effect. He was a dramatic personality, an undiscovered actor.

Crime Does Not Pay soon became one of the leading staples in comics. It was imitated by several competitors, with mixed results. Biro and Wood added more strong titles to the Lev Gleason line. *Daredevil* was one of their better attempts. They also attempted a slick, more expensive supplement-sized, comic magazine called *Tops*. It died a horrible death, but fortunately they could afford the losses. Comic book people were always striving to break into a more respectable media.

In the early 1950s, when the cry against violence in comics was reaching epidemic proportions, local distributors and retailers began to resist magazines such as *Crime Does Not Pay*. Bundles were returned unopened and, although the books still showed a profit, sales declined considerably.

Bob Wood's drinking increased. He was absent for days at a time. Frequently, he would show up bruised by loan sharks and then disappear again. The beatings became more brutal because now Bob was affluent and the stakes were bigger than in his earlier days. Bob's life became as bizarre as the gangsters he dramatized in *Crime Does Not Pay*.


CRIME
DOES NOT PAY
LEV GLEASON PUBLISHER - CHARLES BIRO AND BOB WOOD EDITORS
ALL TRUE
THE MAGAZINE WITH THE WIDEST RANGE OF APPEAL
A FULL 68 PAGE Magazine
CHARLES BIRO
LEV GLEASON PUBLICATIONS

Gleason

continued from page 45

teaching the duty, necessity, desirability, or propriety" of overthrowing any such government.

The act also made it illegal to belong to, organize or help organize any organization or "assembly of persons" who advocated or encouraged alternative forms of administration. While trying to keep within the bounds of patriotism, magazines like *Friday*, as well as leftist newspapers like New York's *PM*, were considered suspect, and monitored for transgressions.

On the surface *Friday* looked like *Life* magazine, in size, shape and its wealth of photo features. But where *Life* might have a photo spread on William Randolph Hearst's antique collection at his famous castle, or a feature on Henry Ford driving his son Edsel around in this year's new model, Dan Gillmor would take a different perspective.

With the spread of Fascism and Hitler's rise to power in Europe, and a Second World War on the horizon, 1939 was the time. And with an emerging clique of East Coast Jewish immigrants making inroads into the magazine distribution and publishing scene, New York was the place.

On their way to becoming famous comic book publishers, people like Martin Goodman and John Goldwater continued to publish a variety of girly magazines, confessionals and exploitative trashy pulps, maybe throwing in a patriotic hero into their comic line, and considering themselves daring to even mention Hitler. But Lev Gleason and Dan Gillmor are otherwise preoccupied, confronting the politics and perceived injustices of the day. The weekly *Friday* magazine attempted to become the bastion of freethinking and compassionate politics for the American public.

Over the course of 60-odd issues in 1940-41, the magazine shows its unwavering loyalties and prejudices. Franklin Delano Roosevelt is the unquestioned savior of America and champion of the common man. His enemies, and those of all good Americans, are big business and capitalists who are often accused of being pro-Fascist and even supporting Hitler to the benefit of their business interests. Many are named and accused, outright, by the not soft-spoken Gillmor.

The magazine took an unpopular stance of championing the cause of American blacks, and waged a vicious campaign against those it considered anti-Semites.

In a typical editorial from the October 12th issue, Gilmore addresses one of Henry Ford's cohorts. Ford's anti-Semitism was exacerbated by two of his closest employees, W.J. Cameron and E.G. Liebold. It was Cameron, as editor of the *Dearborn Independent*, Ford's house organ newspaper, who began to publish anti-Semitic articles commencing with its first issue in June 1926. Cameron promoted a British-Israelite theology that argued that the Anglo-Saxon race was descended from the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel and that those calling themselves Jews were, in fact, usurpers.

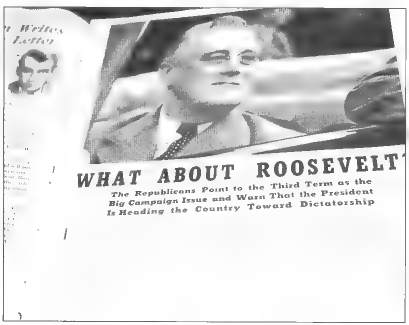
What about the Anglo-Saxon Federation, W.J.? You were an executive of that filth-mongering organization, and you can't deny it. What about the pamphlet you wrote and signed (yes, I said signed) called "Was Jesus a Jew?" Why, the title alone shows that you are an anti-Semite.

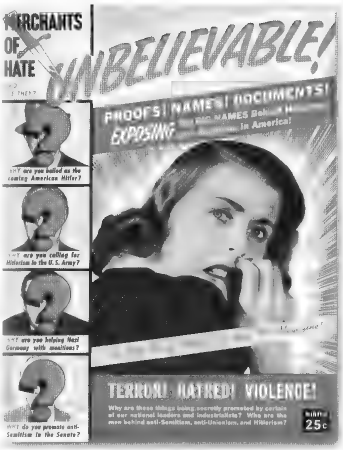
Why don't you say something about the fact that your friend and boss, King Henry [Ford], warmly received and still possesses a medal from the Jew-baiter who outdoes even you—Adolf Hitler? Why don't you say something about Boss Ford's contributions to the Nazis as far back as the early [...] days of Hitler's career? Why don't you say something about the anti-labor, anti-union, strikebreaking, thug-hiring policy of the [...] Ford Motor Company?

Jew-baiting and labor-baiting are two sides of the same coin. Whenever you find an anti-Semite, you can be sure that he is also anti-labor. Whenever you find an anti-Semite, you can be sure he is also against democracy, and it is no mere coincidence."

Strong stuff from a guy who was putting out a line of funny books. But ultimately, *Friday* fails as a magazine. Gillmor reportedly loses somewhere in the neighborhood of $1 million on the two-year venture. The lack of advertising revenues is officially cited, but there are also long-range ongoing libel suits from people like William Randolph Hearst, publishing magnate, and accused pro-Fascist.

Gillmor disappears from the publishing scene, and his second-in-command, Lev Gleason takes control of the


WHAT ABOUT ROOSEVELT
The Republicans Point to the Third Term as the Big Campaign Issue and Warn That the President Is Heading the Country Toward Dictatorship


MERCHANTS OF HATE
UNBELIEVABLE!
PROOFS! NAMES! DOCUMENTS!
EXPOSING
TERROR! HATRED! VIOLENCE!
Why are these things being secretly promoted by certain of our national leaders and industrialists? Who are the men behind anti-Semitism, anti-Unionism, and Hitlerism?
Only 25c

remnants of the operation. Gleason had been listed as "Treasurer" during the one-year New Friday regime. He has the same likes and dislikes, and intractable political stance as Gillmor, but has learned the wisdom of being less overt in his criticism. Gleason starts a new magazine forum, called *Reader's Choice*, a sort of left wing *Reader's Digest*, with essentially the same viewpoint as *Friday*.

But he has other pressing business concerns to attend to at the same time—like making money. Comics are experiencing a publishing boom unprecedented in their history. By 1942 America has entered the War, and soon paper rationing will make 100% sellouts of the four-color booklets a regular occurrence. With few exceptions, the handful of publishers who were canny enough to get in on the ground floor of comic publishing at the end of the '30s and beginning of the '40s become millionaires within the decade.

Consistent with his pro-union and fair treatment of workers idealism, Gleason cuts what he considers an equitable profit-sharing arrangement with his editorial staff, Charles Biro and Bob Wood, giving them a junior partnership status, and more or less complete autonomy as far as their choices in what they put into the comic books. It is a wise decision—and it pays off in spades.

One must take into account that this is far from a standard arrangement for a comic publisher of the day. While DC comics was initially very generous to its star creators like Siegel and Shuster, Bob Kane and William Marston, they kept a tight rein editorially and would never consider having any of their contributors become even minority shareholders in the company.

Martin Goodman of Timely, to become Marvel, and Silberkleit and Goldwater, who strike it rich with Archie, maintain the standard concept of feudalism and class discrimination where the freelance talent pool are essentially the serfs, and there's no mixing of profits with them. If someone wants to produce more art or scripts, that's fine, they will be rewarded accordingly. If they are entrepreneurial enough to start a studio and subcontract the work, that's more than acceptable. But only at the discretion of the company owners is there ever any crossing the line between the bosses and the editorial providers—not even socially. Starting in the industry in 1939, a very young Stan Lee, a relative of Goodman, though still just an employee, will go on to break these unwritten rules throughout his career.

Ironically, in the very first days of the Golden Age of comics, many, including Goodman, tried to form some kind of cooperative arrangement with editorial, initially sharing their profits with a comics packager. But they seem to withdraw from this very quickly, probably because they realize the tremendous profit levels outweigh the incentive value of offering equity. Raiding the staff and reneging on their agreement with the studio operation that created the properties became a standard routine. A number of hungry publishers quickly found out how easily comics were to sell to an insatiable public, and most likely couldn't live with the notion that they were giving away so much that could also be theirs.

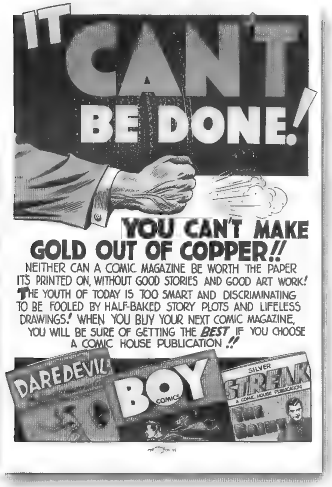
As to who exactly were Gleason's editorial team, Charles Biro and Bob Wood, much can be said. Both gentlemen are no longer with us, but they left their mark on the comics industry in the brief decade or so during which they managed to turn every conventional notion of "comics for kids" upside down.

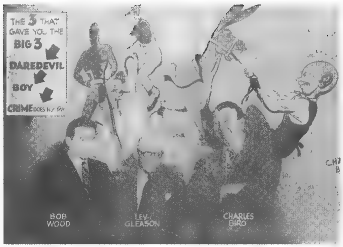
From all accounts, Biro was an interesting guy. He started out in animation and shifted over to comics, probably

when Fleisher studios moved to Florida. Apparently of Hungarian descent, he was very tall, good-looking and considered to be extremely charismatic. There are endless anecdotes, mostly from fellow comics freelancers, about his insatiable appetite for, and success with, the members of the female gender. Biro was from the school of heavy drinking and hard playing that typified some of the best-remembered mid-20th Century creative types. Maybe a designation as the Hemingway of his day would not be an unfair assessment.

Biro had little truck for the genre of heroic fantasy elements that overrode comics in their early days. The heroic perseverance of regular urban young men, often caught in the turmoil of dangerous but realistic life situations, was more his métier. Triumph through adhering to a personal moral code was what a Charles Biro story was about. Let others with science fictional magical abilities and weapons fight strange costumed psychopaths on rooftops.

Endless anecdotes of Biro's exuberant spontaneity and disregard for rules of both his craft and society are many. A minor but charming example of Biro's anarchistic approach to anything comes from artist Gill Fox who was


IT CAN'T BE DONE!
YOU CAN'T MAKE GOLD OUT OF COPPER!!
NEITHER CAN A COMIC MAGAZINE BE WORTH THE PAPER ITS PRINTED ON, WITHOUT GOOD STORIES AND GOOD ART WORK! THE YOUTH OF TODAY IS TOO SMART AND DISCRIMINATING TO BE FOOLED BY HALF-BAKED STORY PLOTS AND LIFELESS DRAWINGS! WHEN YOU BUY YOUR NEXT COMIC MAGAZINE, YOU WILL BE SURE OF GETTING THE BEST IF YOU CHOOSE A COMIC HOUSE PUBLICATION !!
DAREDEVIL
BOY COMICS
SILVER STREAK



giving him a ride somewhere. Stopped at a red light, Biro spotted a car that had hubcaps that matched the ones on his own car. Biro immediately leapt out of the car, pulled off the hubcap, and got back into the car, saying that this would replace the one that he'd lost. I always think this a reflection of Biro's own upbringing on the streets of a big American city in the '20s. Biro would write many stories with true empathy about wild but essentially honest kids who had trouble differentiating right from wrong. He was probably one of them.

According to a number of his probably jealous co-workers, Biro's youthful sexual peccadilloes were legendary. But unlike most of his more introverted comic freelancing peers, Biro managed to find a way to transmit his experiences onto the printed page. An adequate artist, with a flair for violence, it probably came as a surprise that while working at Gleason's he developed into a sensitive writer of long comic stories that demonstrated a true pathos as well as sociological awareness. Biro had a true talent, a flair for involving comic book readers with stories about people with difficult and often dysfunctional backgrounds, probably similar to many of his readers, whose lives had somehow taken a wrong turn. Even as their parents had warned them, they made the wrong kind of friends, moved with the wrong crowd, and somewhere along the line had crossed the boundaries of what was right and good, and most importantly what was legal and illegal.

On the level of the comic book industry, Biro may have assumed the lifestyle of a Hemingway, but to comic book readers he was the Dickens and Faulkner of his day. His audience obviously recognized the sincerity and the skills that Biro put into his four-color mini-epics. No doubt his knowledge came first hand.

Gill Fox recently commented on those days:

I remember when Charlie Biro and Bob Wood shared an apartment in Greenwich Village in New York. They used to brag

about their escapades with women. And they told me that they painted a nude woman. I asked, "How the hell did you get her to undress?" Biro reaches under the bed and pulls out a canvas that's about one quarter finished, with no likeness or head. But the figure was nude. "This is what we use! We let her look at it, paint in a couple of strokes, and she thinks she's being painted."

As the '40s progressed, the sales of Gleason's line shot up. At their height, in the post-War period, Gleason's stable of comics, a mere three monthly titles—*Boy*, *Daredevil* and *Crime Does Not Pay*—were selling (cumulatively) in the two to three million range. An envious Stan Lee would constantly call up Biro and ask him, "Charlie, what's your secret?"

Wood, we know less about, as far as creative input into the mix. He was listed right on the covers, along with Biro, as an editor. Like Biro he had been a journeyman artist, starting out in the '30s with the Chesler comic studio sweatshop. It's possible that his position evolved into something of a production and assembly line coordinator, keeping the traffic flowing, and matching up artists to the scripts being churned out by Biro and other writers like Virginia Hubbell.

Bob Wood's personal story does not have a Charles Biro revelation and transformation happy ending to it. Considered very personable by his male associates raised in Boston, Wood was a seemingly unhinged character, especially when he was on one of his many drinking sprees. It was common knowledge that he regularly beat up a rotating assembly of women friends, and often with extreme brutality. Sometime in the late '50s, after the Gleason line had shut down, Bob Wood was arrested and convicted for causing the death of a woman (I'm not sure it was his wife) with a flatiron in a seedy hotel room. He spent some time in prison and reportedly was looking for comics freelance work in the '60s, after he was released. Apparently, while on one of his drunken binges, he wandered out onto a city street and was fatally struck down by a passing car.

Art Spiegelman, creator of *Maus*, is writing a musical based on the life of Bob Wood. I'll spare further details, so

SUNDAY NEWS, SEPTEMBER 14, 1958 3

Gramercy Park Gets the Horrors

Editor of mag called 'Crime Does Not Pay' murders ad woman in a hotel tryst

By KERMIT JAEDIKER

A BROADWAY-STYLE murder, sexy, loud-mouthed and liquored-up, hit quaint, Victorian-prim Gramercy Park smack in the bustle the other day. While children dispirited restrainedly under the eyes of governesses and elegant old ladies enjoyed their constitutionals behind the spiked iron gates of New York City's only private park, high above the park, in a hotel suite, a free lance cartoonist climaxed 11 days of loving, scouring and scrubbing by bashing his divorcee sweetheart to death with an electric iron.

It was probably the most frightening incident in the district since Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish appeared in the neighborhood's first electric automobile and ran down the same man twice, first in forward then in reverse.

But it was not the aspect of terror attending the murder that appalled Gramercy Park. It was the vulgarity of it all.

Victorian Bastion

The little 127-year-old park at 20th and 21st Sts., between Third and Fourth Aves., is one of the city's last bastions of Victorian architecture and Victorian thinking. Its old-fashioned buildings with their filigreed iron balconies and prissy-beat front gardens hold for the visitor an unexpected charm enhanced by the shutterpers wearing in the backdrop. It is a haven, primarily, for well-heeled people who cling to days past. Outsiders may stroll the sidewalks bordering the park, of course, but the park itself is open only to residents, each of whom has a key to the gates. Since even wealthy children get a yen for ice cream on sticks, the Good Humor salesman is tolerated, but even he cannot penetrate the gates; he must slip the ice cream to his customers between the fence rails. And no woman, even the treasurer of one of the

Killing took place in top floor room, window at left.

by Paul Fliegold, 36, of 8302 E. Third St., Brooklyn.

"Take me down to Greenwich Village," Wood said. "Charles St."

Fliegold started for the Village. He'd driven two blocks when Wood said, "Take me to the Regina Hotel on 17th St."

"Okay."

"I'm in trouble," said Wood. "Awful trouble. I'm going to get a couple of hours sleep and then jump in the river."

"What's the matter?" asked Fliegold.

He added fiddlingly, "You kill somebody?"

as not to spoil anyone's enjoyment of this much-anticipated spectacle.

Not confining himself to just comics and magazines, in the early '40s Gleason published a number of political tracts, including a controversial biography of Tito, then considered a "good" Communist by the West.

The author is Howard Fast, an up-and-coming young novelist, and admitted Communist. A couple years later, they both land in political hot water as part of a group who refuses to disclose information to an official investigative committee that questions their loyalties to the country.

While many histories claim that Biro and Wood's *Crime Does Not Pay* (which Gleason's company inaugurated in '42) was a breakthrough invention for the industry, it was really nothing new on the publishing horizon. True story magazines or "confessionals" had dominated the marketplace for many years. True crime magazines were perennial bestsellers. Gleason's mentors, Bernhard and Lutzen, had started a very successful line of these, with titles like *Special Detective* and *Certified Detective*. They had the most beautifully painted and disturbingly racy covers on the newsstands, and seemed to be able to outdo their competition in finding sordid stories with Nazi-bondage overtones. The company's artists were able to escalate the sleazy looking doll, with a bottle in her hand, and a cigarette hanging on her lip, to a new high.

BOY
COMICS
LEV GLEASON, PUBLISHER - CHARLES BIRO AND BOB WOOD, EDITORS
A FULL 68 PAGE Magazine
LEV GLEASON PUBLICATIONS
IN THIS as in every issue 2 FULL LENGTH
CRIME BUSTER stories
CHARLES BIRO

The official story of how Biro got the idea for a true crime comic comes out of a story about him and Wood being in a hotel bar, and being offered "a dame upstairs to have some fun with." Showing unusually gentlemanly restraint, the pair declined the offer. Possibly they were working on a plotline for *The Little Wise Guys*. As the story goes, the "dame" they passed up turned out to be a kidnapped heiress, and the story hit the front page the next day.

It sounds like a typical editorial concoction. Perhaps they went out for a couple of drinks after hours, and retroactively integrated the newspaper report with their fantasized company history.

Bernhard/Lutzen and Gleason maintained the same address, 114 E. 32nd St. Both operations were publishing digest-sized paperbacks from about '47 on. The Gleason ones included half a dozen true crime nonfiction titles and a handful of conventional soft-core titles.

Bernhard/Lutzen started other new and even more sensational magazines not long after Gleason's *Crime Does Not Pay* hits the market, the most successful one with the title *True Crime*. Along with Gleason, they issue a number of one-shot comics during the War, to take advantage of the odd extra paper allotment that comes their way.

In 1947, the co-publishing team tries to recapture the sales glory they missed out on by selling their fledgling comics line to Gleason and Gillmor. They hire Jack Cole to produce a new line of comics with a sister title to their magazine called *True Crime Comics*. Even in a period of notoriously sensationalistic "adult" comic books, it is outstandingly and wonderfully sleazy. The dame with the ever present cigarette dangling from her mouth introduces the main story in the first issue with the great title "Murder, Morphine and Me." Readers are told that it's "Based on a True Story." Possibly it is.

In the same period, Bernhard and Lutzen gravitate toward digest-sized paperbacks, starting a number of new lines with expected racy covers and titles. Gleason also makes a very brief foray into paperbacks, under his own imprint as well as a Thriller Library imprint line. The former is the usual urban angst and implicit sex package, while the latter is a line of true crime books.

Bernhard splits off with Lutzen and his Skye Publications and goes on to become one of the biggest producer of soft-core pubs in the US. Lutzen, under his Sterling imprint, branches off into the newly developed field of what is later to be called "men's sweat" magazines.

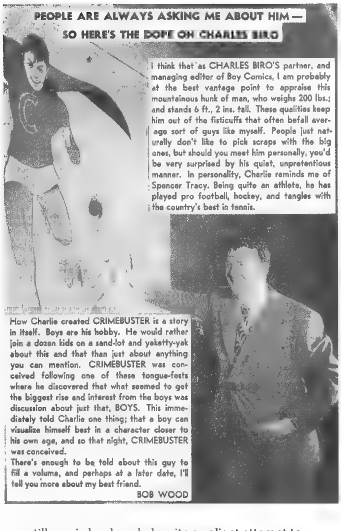
Gleason, meanwhile, along with his successful comics line has been cultivating a small line of magazines. There are three of them, the foremost is the previously mentioned *Reader's Choice* that has become another forum for outspoken critics of big business, corrupt politicians and the endemic racism that is in full bloom in America in these pre-integration days. Subtle attempts to portray the positive aspects of Russia and the alternative forms of government are in the mix.

Gleason launches a magazine called simply *Lovers* in 1944. It seems to be a conventional Romance genre supposedly true confessions type of thing. Reportedly there are comics continuities in some issues, which might qualify Gleason, technically, as the first publisher of Romance comics.

The third magazine, started in 1946, is called *Salute*. Its subheading is "Produced by the Former Editors and Writers of *Yank* and *Stars and Stripes*." The magazine is a mixture of features aimed at the returning soldier. Again Gleason attempts to introduce his political messages into the mix, with strong pieces on the positive aspects of the labor unions, political corruption, and unethical practices of big business.

Gleason again runs afoul of the authorities, who claim that his operation is Communist-infiltrated, and is attempting to subvert the military mind. There is some truth to the accusation.

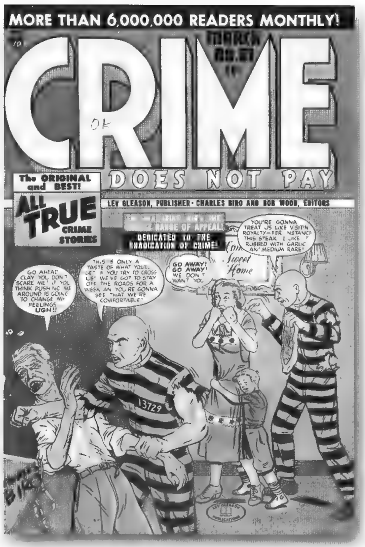
Gleason capitulates, and drops out of magazine publishing. His attempt to enter into the paperback field is short-lived. He tries a new and experimental comic in magazine format called *Tops*, but the production values


PEOPLE ARE ALWAYS ASKING ME ABOUT HIM—
SO HERE'S THE DOPE ON CHARLES BIRO
I think that as CHARLES BIRO'S partner, and managing editor of Boy Comics, I am probably at the best vantage point to appraise this mountainous hunk of man, who weighs 200 lbs.; and stands 6 ft., 2 ins. tall. These qualities keep him out of the fisticuffs that often befall average sort of guys like myself. People just naturally don't like to pick scraps with the big ones, but should you meet him personally, you'd be very surprised by his quiet, unpretentious manner. In personality, Charlie reminds me of Spencer Tracy. Being quite an athlete, he has played pro football, hockey, and tangles with the country's best in tennis.
How Charlie created CRIMEBUSTER is a story in itself. Boys are his hobby. He would rather join a dozen kids on a sand-lot and yakety-yak about this and that than just about anything you can mention. CRIMEBUSTER was conceived following one of these tongue-fests where he discovered that what seemed to get the biggest rise and interest from the boys was discussion about just that, BOYS. This immediately told Charlie one thing; that a boy can visualize himself best in a character closer to his own age, and so that night, CRIMEBUSTER was conceived.
There's enough to be told about this guy to fill a volume, and perhaps at a later date, I'll tell you more about my best friend.
BOB WOOD

are still comic book and, despite a valiant attempt to introduce comics for an adult readership, the hybrid dies with the second issue. There are reports of a third, which may have had some limited distribution.

By the end of the '40s, Gleason is strictly a comics publisher for the first time in his career. But as a publisher he has not given up the good fight. He becomes a founding member for a new organization comprised of his business peers, called the Association of Comics Magazine Publishers (ACMP) in July 1948. The ACMP attempted to form a code of standards for decency in comic books. The comic books which met these standards were permitted to carry the ACMP stamp of approval. This attempt at self-regulation wasn't really successful because major publishers, like Dell, DC and Classics, boycotted the ACMP. Smaller publishers who thrived on exploitation and violence seemed not particularly interested in putting themselves out of business.

Gleason was the second President of this organization and assumed an active role in defending the entire industry against attacks coming from the press, women's magazines, and various watchdog organizations. It was an


MORE THAN 6,000,000 READERS MONTHLY!
CRIME
DOES NOT PAY
The ORIGINAL and BEST!
ALL TRUE CRIME STORIES
LEV GLEASON, PUBLISHER • CHARLES BIRO AND BOB WOOD, EDITORS
DEDICATED TO THE ANNIHILATION OF CRIME!
Home Sweet Home
13729

uphill battle. Crime comics, which Gleason had pioneered, came under particular scrutiny. Many communities banned them outright, and they became an illegal import commodity in Canada.

Gleason's sales leveled off dramatically as the field not only became flooded with competition in the True Crime comic genre, but distributors and retailers became skittish about carrying comics that had crime in the title. Gleason tried to make a rebound by diversifying. He hired some seasoned editorial people and attempted to crack the newly developed Romance comics field. Gleason was that rare comics publisher that appreciated the importance of having a strong editorial input and high quality story values.

Lovers Lane and *Boy Meets Girl* were Gleason's two newest titles in 1950. As would be expected they are far more mature and realistic that the usual romantic slush that comprises the competition. Gleason has already amplified the company's output, adding a second crime title, *Crime and Punishment*. A third Western variation, *Desperadoes*, is transformed into *Black Diamond Western*, an unexceptional Lone Ranger variant.

The line continues into the '50s, now about seven different titles per month, a dramatic increase from the tight line of three comics that were the core of the Lev Gleason line. The overall quality becomes somewhat diluted, although the writing and art are still well above the levels of almost anything else in the market.

Bob Wood's name falls off the masthead sometime in 1953. Biro leaves in 1955 and is said to have carved a niche in the booming advertising field. He is heard from, occasionally, maintaining contact with a new generation of comic fans in the '60s and '70s. He maintains a strong commitment to the creative principles he developed in an industry that has been influenced heavily by his pioneering contributions.

The company is quietly shut down in 1956. No fanfare, no remorse, no tears.

After reaching an all-time peak in 1952, with somewhere in the vicinity of a billion comic books sold in the US annually, overall sales and performance on individual titles started to decline. Conventionally this is blamed on Frederic Wertham and an anti-comics crusade that spread across the country, culminating in a Senate subcommittee investigation early in 1954. The industry set up its own self-censoring organization in response, the Comics Code, with Gleason as one of their first subscribers.

In actual fact, newsstand sales on everything went into a period of stagnation and declined from 1953 onward. Television penetration in North American households was accelerating. TV was the competition—and it was free. Paper costs, shipping, printing and other costs were rising, and the profit margins on comic books became slimmer. There were success stories, like Gaines's *MAD*, still in comic book form. *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories*, the all-time top selling comic book, sold an average of 3.5 million copies every issue. This was probably greater than the yearly total sale of Gleason's *Crime Does Not Pay*. As city dwellers started moving out to the suburbs, tastes and buying patterns began to change. Paperbacks, slick women's magazines, and newer hipper stuff like *Playboy* became what distributors and retailers were most anxious to carry.

Comic books could have upgraded their look and price—tried to become more appealing to a wider audience, and most importantly do what was necessary to attract advertising. That is what made it possible for most publishers to thrive—the lack of dependency on high volume sales. So comics stagnated, and sales got to the

point where it was unprofitable to continue.

When Lev Gleason closed down the company in early 1956, it looks like it must have been a last minute decision. Dick Giordano recalls doing a story that was scheduled to appear in an issue of *Daredevil*. When he delivered it, they told him he could keep it—there were to be no more Lev Gleason comics.

Martin Goodman picked up the *Daredevil* name for his new superhero line in 1963. Fastidious about legalities, Goodman would have checked to ascertain that there was not violation of copyright or trademark. Gleason didn't renew or contest the use of the *Daredevil* name. A sort of fitting epitaph for the company.

Ironically, Stan Lee, who would wildly phone up Charles Biro in the '40s, trying to find the secret formula is the "last man standing." His *Daredevil* hit the screens earlier this year, and the court dates are being set for Stan Lee to try to prove that Marvel has bilked him of tens of millions of dollars.

Goodman, who sold Marvel in the '70s, is long gone, Gleason died in 1971, and Biro, who went into the advertising business, is now gone. Morris Lutzen continues with his successful Sterling line, moving into movie and television magazines. Arthur Bernhard stays in the publishing game for a surprisingly long time. After an active period of publishing detective and men's sweat magazines in the '50s and '60s, along with an enormous quantity of sleazy paperbacks, he returned to his pulp roots and was publishing a small line of ultra-low budget Science Fiction magazines into the early '80s. Ironically, he was publishing *Amazing Stories*, the Gernsback pulp that essentially started it all, back in 1926.

Dan Gillmor did continue to write books and articles with strong leftist sentiments. Oddly enough, his highest profile activities relate to association with The Condon Report, a serious attempt to scientifically document the existence or non-existence of UFOs.

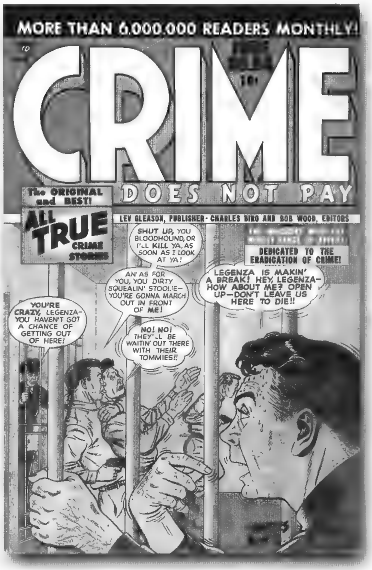
Lev Gleason is heard from no more. The man who recommended to his young audience that they pass on their copies of *Crime Does Not Pay* to their fathers to read, seems to have said whatever he had to say, and quietly faded away. One unconfirmed report had him moving to Alaska.

Many questions still remain about Leverett Stone Gleason. One is who his financial backers were. We know that in the early '60s some of them reappear in a new company called Kinney Services. A corporation with divergent interests, including cleaning services and funeral parlors, this publicly listed consortium rapidly grew, changed names, and made a number of media acquisitions, including major film, television and publishing companies. One of their acquisitions was the magazine *MAD*, as well as an established line of comics called DC, along with its sister distribution operation Independent News.

Kinney changed its name many times in the ensuing years. First to Warner Communications, and later to Time/Warner/AOL. Apparently they still publish comic books.

Michael Feldman is an enigmatic and highly opinionated guy who claims he is doing the definitive history of the comics industry. He has worked in publishing for 30 years, at every level from writer to publisher, domestically and internationally. He is hoping someone reading this can help fill in the gaps on Lev Gleason. Contact him at michael.feldman@sympatico.ca.

Thanks to old friend Harry Matetsky for his help with this article.—RC

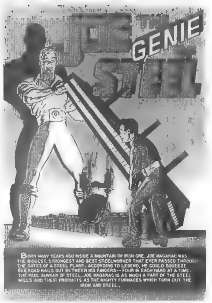

MORE THAN 6,000,000 READERS MONTHLY!
CRIME
DOES NOT PAY
The ORIGINAL and BEST!
ALL TRUE CRIME STORIES
LEV GLEASON, PUBLISHER · CHARLES BIRO AND BOB WOOD, EDITORS
SHUT UP, YOU BLOOMOLUND, OR I'LL KILL YA AS SOON AS I LOOK AT YA!
DEDICATED TO THE ERADICATION OF CRIME!
AN AS FOR YOU, YOU DIRTY SQUEALIN' STOOLIE— YOU'RE GONNA MARCH OUT IN FRONT OF ME!
LEGENZA IS MAKIN' A BREAK! HEY, LEGENZA— HOW ABOUT ME? OPEN UP—DON'T LEAVE US HERE TO DIE!!
YOU'RE CRAZY, LEGENZA! YOU HAVEN'T GOT A CHANCE OF GETTING OUT OF HERE!
NO! NO! THEY'LL BE WAITIN' OUT THERE WITH THEIR TOMMIES!!

Commercial Comics Company

[continued from page 16]

By 1950 Malcolm Ater Productions was called Commercial Comics, Inc., though both names were used through the years, and had offices at 1507 M Street NW, Washington, DC. By that time they had produced political comics for Senator Scott Lucas (D-Ill, and Majority Leader of the Senate), Connecticut Governor Chester Bowles, Senator Brien McMahon, Congressman Al Loveland (D-Iowa) and Arkansas Governor Sid McMath. They had also produced the stridently left wing magnum opus *Joe Worker and the Story of Labor* for the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), *The Story of Elpido Quirno* (for President of the Philippines), *Joe, the Genie of Steel* (for U.S. Steel), and *America Under Socialism*, and they were about to make their cultural mark again.

Smokey the Bear, a real bear cub orphaned in a forest fire, had been used in a series of ads by the National Forest Service and had proven popular. The Forest Service approached Ater about producing a comic and the result was 1950's *Forest Fire*. This is a lovely book. The character was created by Rudy Wendelein, and the art is by Wendelein and Sparling. Mr. Wendelien was indeed



a skilled cartoonist, with a style that enabled him to render the cartoony Smokey and two small bear cubs (in trousers and a dress) next to their realistic animal chums and humans in a seamless manner. This is the first Smokey and predates the Dell series by five years.

Ater's business was taking off. His comic book promotions had drawn such attention that others had begun producing political books. There was a mini scandal in 1950 when the United Labor League of Ohio commissioned Elliot Caplan to do an anti-Robert Taft comic and many thought the work to be libelous [see sidebar]. Many newspapers and magazines took note of the proliferation of political comics, and *Life* magazine reproduced some panels of Ater's and others' books in an

article that acknowledged Ater as originator of the political comic.

Elsewhere, Ater contrasted his own business philosophy at the time: "Tell the story of your candidate, but mention the other guy as little as possible."

Ater's business continued to grow. During the 1950s he continued to produce political books with a circulation average of 650,000 or 700,00 and industrial books with an average circulation of one million copies. One of the more interesting from a collector's standpoint was a government-sponsored book on nuclear war, *The H-Bomb and You* (1955). This was similar to a 1951 color strip that ran on the front page of the *Washington Post* in July 1951 titled "If An A-Bomb Falls." Also notable was the first Oral Roberts comic. The popular faith healer, one of the first to take advantage of the new medium of television, was so impressed with Ater's book, *Healing for You*, that he launched his own imprint, Tele-Pix, which produced 19 issues of *Oral Roberts True Stories*.

In 1943, before Ater's entrance into the promotional comics field, the industry had produced 20 titles. Print runs totaled nine million copies generating $250,000 worth of sales. By 1951, 120 books were produced for a combined print run of 100 million copies, generating $2 million in sales, and it was estimated that 1952 sales would top $3 million for 180 million copies of almost 200 titles. Prices for commercial customers were estimated at 2.25 or 2.50 cents a copy for press runs of 500,000. Half of the costs went to printing and paper, 30% for script and art, and the remaining 20% was profit.

Ater sold the concept of the books originally, but as his business grew he was usually approached by customers to develop comics. He worked directly with his clients, writing the strips from their biographies or promotional material. Malcolm Ater was a good commercial writer. His dialogue was clear and simple. He organized information well and had a real grasp of the structure of a comic book page. He was conscious of the visual appeal of his work and in a

1950 interview spoke of moving away from a traditional comic book style. After completing the script, Ater farmed the artwork out to one of several artists, one of whom was Jack Sparling, a relative by marriage. Malcolm then published the books and delivered them to his clients for distribution.

In 1960 Ater traveled to Alabama to meet with George Wallace, who was running for governor. By Malcolm's retelling, Wallace leaned across his desk and stated, "I don't see how a damn Yankee like you can come down here to Alabama and help me get elected." Ater replied, "Well, Judge, if you'll recall, I came down here a few years ago and worked for John Patterson and helped defeat you!" Wallace and he became friends and the result was the comic *Alabama Needs "The Little Judge" George Wallace for the Big Job*. This book is pro-segregationist and in it Wallace promises to send "back north every freedom rider, sit-in, and every other troublemaker" sent by NAACP.

Pro-segregation books were also prepared for other southern candidates and these are noted in the publications list. These books typically give a nod to ideas of "Southern tradition" along with more strident statements such as being anti-beatnik, anti-goon and anti-NAACP.

During the 1960s the business continued to grow, and Ater became the commercial agent for Publishers Hall Syndicate and was working with their well known characters such as Dennis the Menace, Mark Trail, B.C., Andy Capp and Rex Morgan, MD.

Under this contract, Ater produced the popular *Dennis the Menace Takes a Poke at Poison* (1961, with a completely redone second version in 1981), and eventually twenty million copies were printed. This was a very influential book, and Ater was told by the Department of Agriculture, which had commissioned it, that they believed it to have been an extremely valuable educational tool.

During this time Publishers Hall approached him with a plan to put $250,000 into his business and put their salesmen out on the road to promote his product, but Ater declined, preferring to keep control of his business. "I don't want to become a millionaire," he said.

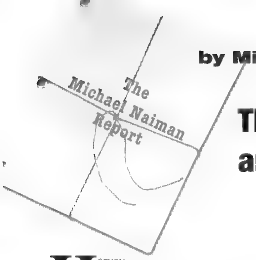
During the 1960s the purely political work became less popular and the bulk of his work became more informational and funded by the federal government. This trend continued into the 1970s with the production of books such as *Think First of Your Unborn Child* (Rex Morgan, MD, introduces fetal alcohol syndrome), *It's Best to Know...About Alcohol*, *Teenage Booby Trap* and *What if They Call Me Chicken* (all anti-drug). There were numerous cancer awareness books for the National Cancer Society and even the mischievous Dennis the Menace turned relevant for the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect's *Dennis the Menace Coping with Family Stress*.

This change in content and funding was fine with Ater as he'd come to see politicians as hypocrites—though he still enjoyed the friendship

of George Wallace, who by this time had pragmatically and honestly recanted his racist views and was seen by Ater and many others as a straight shooting realist.

During the 1970s Ater produced *The President's House*, a slick magazine given away to White House visitors during the Ford and Carter Administrations.

[continued on page 77]



by Michael Naiman

The Harvey Boys—and Girls—and Ghosts

Harvey World Famous Comics created by Alfred Harvey (who, at one time, worked for Fox Publications alongside young talents Joe Simon and Jack Kirby) scored early successes through well-known characters licensed from other creators, such as The Green Hornet, Blondie, Terry and the Pirates, Dick Tracy, Li'l Abner, Felix the Cat and many others.

Harvey was joined by his brothers Leon and Robert. It was in the 1950s that the company acquired the rights to a family of animated characters created by Paramount Pictures for animated short subjects, including Baby Huey, Little Audrey and a friendly ghost named Casper. Alfred Harvey augmented this roster with equally endearing creations of his own—Wendy the Good Little Witch, Little Dot and Richie Rich—and all enjoyed tremendous popularity in their comics (and in theatrical, then televised, cartoons) throughout the 1960s.

He also proudly lent the characters to public service announcements, increasing their visibility and firmly establishing Harvey Comics as a leader. The original company ceased publishing in 1982, but resumed publication in 1986 by Alan Harvey, Alfred's eldest son. Then, in 1989, Jeffrey Montgomery bought the company, renamed it Harvey Entertainment, and republished the old Harvey comics as "Harvey Classics."

He struck a worldwide publishing and distribution deal with Marvel; distributed the animated cartoons in every market; sold 20% of the company to MCA, parent company of Universal Studios (which licensed the rights to use the characters in its theme parks); and optioned Casper and Richie Rich for two multi-million dollar feature films.

Alan Harvey retained the rights to certain Harvey characters such as Sad Sack and Black Cat and has published under the names of Lorne-Harvey Publications and Recollections. Harvey Entertainment, meanwhile, ceased publishing in 1994. Montgomery was ousted in 1997 and the company changed names to Sunland Entertainment in 2000, the current owners of the Harvey characters. The licensing of the Harvey characters is currently handled by Classic Media.

Richie Rich

The poor little rich boy made his debut as backup in *Little Dot* in 1953. Artist Warren Kremer and Harvey Editor Sid Jacobson both lay claim to creating the character (and in the case of Warren, named him after his son): the realities point to Harvey Comics founder, Alfred Harvey, as Richie's creator as early as the 1930s. Richie regularly appeared with his friends, Freckles and Pee-Wee Friendly, his parents, Richard and Regina Rich, and his girlfriend, Gloria Glad.

Richie's rival is his snobbish cousin, Reggie Van Dough. Other regulars like Cadbury, the perfect butler, did not appear until the '60s, and others later still. Richie became a major Harvey star, but did not have his own title until 1960. Prior to that, he made two starring appearances in the *Harvey Hits* anthology series. Richie made up for lost time by adding *Richie Rich Millions*, *Richie Rich Dollars and Cents*, etc. In the '70s, Richie was starring in 32 different titles every two months! More issues and stories have been published about Richie Rich than any other character in the entire history of comics books, with over 2000 issues to his credit.

There really are not any issues that are difficult to find—including #1 and the two *Harvey Hits* appearances, though #9 is harder to find than #3. *Richies* published since 1970 (the great majority of all Richie Richs) are in plentiful supply. The *Richie Rich* digests, published from about 1991 until they ceased in 1994, have become hard to find.

Sales: *Richie Rich* #4 CGC 8.0 VF $200 (88% of *Guide*), #5 VF $65 (28% of *Guide*), #20 VG/FN $36 (1.2X *Guide*), #37 VG/FN $20 (*Guide*!), #45 CGC 9.6 NM $160 (2.28X *Guide*), #54 VG $10 (1.25X *Guide*); *Richie Rich Dollars & Cents* #2 FN+ $33 (1.22X *Guide*), #9 FN $16 (1.33X *Guide*), #40 FN $10.50 (1.75X *Guide*); *Richie Rich Success Stories* #7 NM 9.6 $138 (2.12X *Guide*), #16 CGC 9.8 NM $172 (3.44X *Guide*), #20 NM 9.6 $158 (3.16X *Guide*), #32 NM 9.8 $138 (4.92X *Guide*), #37 CGC 9.8 NM $165 (5.89X *Guide*); *Richie Rich Money World Digest* (All sold for over NM *Guide* in less than NM condition) #1 FN/VF $6, #2 FN/VF $5, #4 VF $5, #5 VF $5, #6 VF $5; *Richie Rich Gold Nuggets Digest* #2 VF $5 (1.6X *Guide*); *Richie Rich Adventure Digest* #1 FN/VF $6 (1.5X NM), #2 VF $5 (1.25X NM), #3 VF $5 (1.25X NM); *Richie Rich Big Bucks* #3 VF $3, #4 VF $3, #5 VF $3 (All sold for NM *Guide*); *Richie Rich Vacations Digest* #1 (10/92) VF+ $6 (1.5X NM *Guide*), #1 (10/93) VF- $5 (1.25X *Guide*).

Little Dot

She began as a supporting feature in *Sad Sack Comics* #1 (Sep 1949), looking very different from today, and her obsession with dots was not as evident. It wasn't until 1953, when Dot received her own book, that she was redesigned in the familiar Warren Kremer style and took on the "Harvey" look. Stories fall into three categories: 1) Dot's obsession with dots or anything circular or "dot-shaped," 2) Dot's friendship with Little Lotta and other friends in Bonnie Dell, and 3) Dot's adventures with her endless supply of Uncles and Aunts. This latter category eventually became the basis for a Little Dot spin-off title, *Little Dot's Uncles and Aunts*.

The first 50 issues of *Little Dot* are rare,

particularly in higher grade. Over the last couple of years more of issues 1-5 have been seen than 6-10. Issues 11-20 are also very difficult to find. Harvey collectors say that #18 has been the hardest to locate because it has traditionally been the last issue to fill in the run. Another series, *Little Dot Dotland*, are not difficult to find. *Dot's Uncles and Aunts* (entirely giant-sized issues) are a little harder.

Sales: *Little Dot* #1 (1st app. of Richie Rich and Little Lotta) VG $356 (1.2X *Guide*), #2 CGC 9.0 VF/NM $966 (1.99X *Guide*), #3 CGC VF- $209 (63% of *Guide*); *Little Dot's Uncles and Aunts* #20 VG $8 (1.14X *Guide*).

Little Lotta

Little Lotta Plump first appeared in 1953 as a supporting feature for Little Dot. Her obsession with food equals Dot's obsession with dots. Food does not make Lotta obese. Instead, the more Lotta eats the stronger she becomes. Lotta has put her tremendous strength to good use and, on more than one occasion, expressed her desire to join the Bonnie Dell Police Department when she gets older. Lotta has many friends. Besides Little Dot, she's had adventures featuring Richie Rich, Little Audrey and Gloria. She has a boyfriend named Gerald, who is Lotta's opposite. He is a diminutive boy with glasses who is not very strong and is very shy. Lotta and Gerald have many adventures together and frequently have dressed up to imitate their favorite comic book hero, Flying Man. When dressed up, Lotta becomes "Leaping Lotta." Lotta's initial popularity was strong enough that in 1955 she was awarded her own title. Overall, Lotta as a character was not popular enough to sustain additional titles, she only had one spin-off, *Little Lotta in Foodland*. It was thought at one point that she also appeared in a *Little Lotta Foodtown*, but this turned out to be false. Lotta has been penned by the versatile Warren Kremer and Howard Post, but for the majority of the years she was drawn by Sid Couchy and Dom Sileo. *Little Lotta* was published from 1955-1976, when Harvey's Richie Rich explosion took over. Lotta's book was canceled, along with *Little Audrey*, *Little Dot* and *Wendy*, after 120 issues (#121 was advertised, but never issued). Lotta remained a supporting feature in the back of Richie Rich books until Harvey's 1982 demise.

Lotta's regular series is not that difficult to find. For some reason, issues 6-20 are toughest. *Little Lotta in Foodland* is more difficult, partially because they were giants and didn't sell all that well. It took eight years for that series to reach #29 before it was cancelled.

Sales: *Little Lotta* #1 GD $32.50 (*Guide*); *Little Lotta in Foodland* #1 (68 Pages) VG/FN $39 (1.3X *Guide*).

Casper

The friendly ghost first appeared in a cartoon entitled (appropriately) *The Friendly Ghost*, based on an unpublished story written by Seymour V. Reit (who, among many other things, has written for Archie Comics) and illustrated by animator Joe Oriolo (best known for his 1960s work on Felix the Cat). The cartoon was released in 1945 by Paramount's Famous Studios as one of its "Noveltoons." This sentimental tale of a ghost who didn't want to scare anyone was well enough received to spark a sequel, *There's Good Boos Tonight* (1948).

During the 1950s, Casper cartoons, which all had more-or-less the same plot, followed with monotonous regularity. The last theatrically-released Casper cartoon was *Casper's Birthday Party* (1959).

Casper was unusual among Famous Studios characters in that he wasn't a knock-off of something else. Little Audrey was a transparent copy of Little Lulu; and Herman & Katnip were obviously cribbed from Tom and Jerry, but Casper was Casper, and not a copy of anything else. In fact, he later spawned comic-book imitators of his own, including Marvel/Atlas' *Homer the Happy Ghost*, Ajax's *Spunky the Smiling Spook* and Charltons' *Timmy the Timid Ghost*.

In 1949, Casper became a comic book character, when St. John Publishing secured the rights to do all of Paramount's characters in that venue. It was in St. John's *Casper the Friendly Ghost* #1 (Sep 1949), that Casper first received his actual name.

In 1952, the license transferred to Harvey Comics, which bought the characters outright in the late 1950s. Casper's comics outlasted his theatrical career—they were published regularly until 1982, and sporadically since. It was in the comics that he acquired his family, the Ghostly Trio; ghost horse, Nightmare; and nemesis, Spooky the Tough Little Ghost.

The St. John issues are very difficult to find, particularly in nice condition. Issue 1 is more often seen than either #2, 3, 4 or 5.

Harvey took over the series with issue 61 (actually published under the title of *Harvey Hits* #61, aka #6) that issue is seldom seen. Seen even less is #7, with a very cool orange cover of Casper scared by a skeleton puppet. *Casper* #34 and #59 are a little harder to locate because of their attractive covers.

Casper's other series are not at all difficult to find, with some exceptions: including *Casper's Ghostland* #9 and *Nightmare and Casper* #1-5. Some early '60s issues that can be found anywhere include *The Friendly Ghost Casper* #23, *Hot Stuff* #25 and *Spooky* #46. This is because of a warehouse find that included these three, and there must have been hundreds of them because they are seen week after week for sale on eBay.

Sales: *Casper* #2 (St. John) VG $127.50 (36% of *Guide*), #3 VG $34 (26% of *Guide*), #4 GD $41 (75% of *Guide*), #5 GD+ $34 (62% of *Guide*); *Casper* (Harvey) #20 (1st Wendy) VG+ $157.50 (3.4X *Guide*); *Casper and Nightmare* #12 and #13 VG/FN $8 each (1.06X *Guide*), #18 GD $4 (1.33X *Guide*), #26 FN $9 (1.5X *Guide*), #32 FN+ $12 (2X *Guide*); *Casper and the Ghostly Trio* #1 FN/VF $16 (1.1X *Guide*), #2 VG $7 (1.75X *Guide*), #3 VG/FN $9 (1.8X *Guide*); *Casper Digest* Vol. 2 #4 VF $5 (1.42X NM *Guide*), Vol. 2 #9 VF- $4 (1.14X NM *Guide*); *Casper Adventure Digest* #5 VF $4 (1.14X *Guide*); *Casper Enchanted Tales Digest* #5 FN/VF $4 (1.14X NM *Guide*).

This issue's column would not have been possible without the input from Mark Arnold and The Harveyville Fun Times, Quinton Clem, Doug Sulipa and Donald Markstein and toonopedia.com.

CBM Market Watch

A report of market indicator sales (including % of Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide) by Michael Naiman

20,000 Leagues Under the Sea
FC 614 VF/NM $36 37%

Adventure
#222 FN $56 60%
#267 VG $170 98%

Aim at the Stars
FC 1148 VF/NM $62 82%

All-American Men of War
#16 VG $30 48%
#27 VG+ $26 59%
#40 VG $22 61%
#69 FN $26 62%
#77 VF $30 49%

Amazing Spider-Man
#13 VG $126 90%
#24 VG $33 61%
#27 FN $125 1.3X
#40 FN $90 81%
#59 NM- $87 70%
#78 VF $38 68%
#96 NM- $225 1.5X
#124 VF/NM $29 55%
#135 VF $34 68%
#149 NM $36 50%
#300 VF/NM $60 71%

Animal Comics
#24 VF- $35 61%

Aquanauts
FC 1197 NM- $49 52%

Atlantis, the Lost Continent
FC 1188 NM $178 1.19X

Avengers
#3 FN- $110 89%

Batman
#85 VG $66 58%
#106 VG $100 116%
#121 VG $137 149%
#121 FN $178 129%
#123 VG $49 82%
#150 NM $70 47%
#165 VF $64 106%
#171 VG $56 76%
#200 NM $158 93%
#256 FN $61 407%
#359 FN+ $42 700%

Black Cat
#64 FN $23 37%

Blue Phantom
#1 NM $13 33%

Bonanza
FC 1283 NM $51 20%

Boris Karloff Thriller
#1 NM $76 63%

Captain America
#103 VF/NM $31 55%
#105 VF $20 53%
#112 VF $21 72%
#113 VF $30 55%

Charlie Chaplin
#317 GD $150 64%

Colt .45
#7 NM $38 35%

Danger Man
#FC 1231 VF+ $23 27%

Daniel Boone
#FC 1163 NM+ $38 58%

Daredevil
#1 VG- $265 73%
#2 FN $152 Guide
#4 VF $127 57%
#168 NM $90 1.06X
#181 NM- $15 68%

Daring Mystery
#1 GD "$1475" 82%

David & Goliath
FC 1205 NM- $40 47%

Defenders (Dell)
#2 NM $38 Guide

Detective
#200 VG+ $105 78%

Dinosaurus
#FC 1120 NM $32 30%

Doctor Solar
#1 VF $125 83%

Drift Marlo
#1 VF $9 25%

Duke of the K-9 Patrol
#1 NM- $18 39%

Ellery Queen
FC 1165 NM $43 28%

Ensign O'Toole
#1 VF+ $14 66%

Everything's Ducky
FC 1251 VF $52 1.53X

Famous Funnies
#214 VG- $130 53%

Famous Indian Tribes
#1 VF+ $16 1.03X

Fantastic Four
#4 VG- $325 72%
#26 VF- $212 69%
#26 VF+ $400 1.3X
#28 VG+ $67 1.08X
#48 VG $130 79%
#48 FN- $153 62%
#49 VF- $136 65%
#72 VF- $24 53%

Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse
FC 1250 NM $41 48%

Funny Stuff
#24 FN $26 79%
#32 VF- $50 89%

GI Combat
#71 FN- $26 66%
#72 VG $25 96%

GI Joe
#151 VF/NM $28 1.33X

Green Lantern (SA)
#4 VG+ $70 1.13X

Greyfriars Bobby
FC 1189 NM $188 1.98X

Horsemasters
FC 1260 NM- $41 23%

Hot Stuff
#36 VG- $20 2.5X

Hulk
#102 VF/NM $209 89%

I Love Lucy
#1 FN $180 1.13X
#3 FN+ $80 1.26X

Iron Man
#1 VF+ $305 99%
#14 VF $29 97%

Iron Man & Sub-Mariner
#1 VF $125 1.21X

Johnny Ringo
FC 1142 VF/NM $13 17%

Jonah Hex
#1 VF/NM $90 96%

Jumbo
#128 GD+ $36 2X

Jungle Cat
FC 1136 VF $91 58%

Kidnapped
FC 1101 NM $84 Guide

King of Kings
FC 1236 VF $103 1.68X

Marvel Spotlight
#2 NM $150 63%

Master of the World
FC 1157 VF+ $41 73%

McHale's Navy
#1 NM $75 94%

Metal Men
#6 VG $12 75%
#7 VG $12 75%
#10 FN $18 75%

Mysteries of Unexplained Worlds
#22 NM $51 24%
#24 NM $32 15%
#26 NM $31 15%

Mysterious Island
FC 1213 NM $89 74%

National Velvet
FC 1312 NM $19 42%

Nurses (GK)
#1 NM $26 62%

On the Double
FC 1232 VF+ $50 1.47X

Reptilicus
#1 VF+ $45 31%

Restless Gun
FC 1146 NM $128 1.16X

Return of Gorgo
#3 NM $51 51%

Robin Hood (GK)
#1 VF+ $13 73%

Sea Hunt
#10 NM $49 45%

#11 NM $50 45%
#12 NM $50 45%

Sherlock Holmes
FC 1169 VF/NM $61 35%

Showcase
#45 VG+ $40 69%
#88 NM $22 92%

Space Adventures
#37 NM $68 32%
#38 NM $111 53%

Spartacus
FC 1139 NM $42 24%

Story of Ruth
FC 1144 NM $40 32%

Sub-Mariner (SA)
#7 NM- $20 44%

Sugarfoot
FC 1147 VF/NM $22 23%

Supercar
#1 NM $169 56%

Superman
#9 FN $862 Guide

#91 VG- $51 53%
#98 VG $51 64%
#110 VG $46 58%
#112 FN $50 48%
#127 VG+ $45 75%
#147 FN $63 91%
#172 NM $49 54%

Superman Annual
#1 VG $66 39%

Swamp Fox
FC 1179 VF/NM $36 38%

Tales of Wells Fargo
FC 1167 NM $133 1.21X

Tarzan of the Apes to Color
#nn GD- $300 1.1X

Thief of Baghdad
FC 1229 NM $23 25%

Thor
#169 VF $20 59%

Tomahawk
#11 VG $50 1.04X

Tombstone Territory
FC 1123 VF+ $25 36%

Twilight Zone
#3 NM $49 70%

Weird Fantasy
#15 FN $90 53%

Werewolf by Night
#1 NM $93 85%

Wolverine Mini-series
#1 VF $15 44%

Wonders of Aladin
FC 1255 VF $34 63%

X-Men
#18 FN+ $90 1.87X
#94 VG $152 1.31X
#137 NM $38 84%
#24 VF/NM $80 64%
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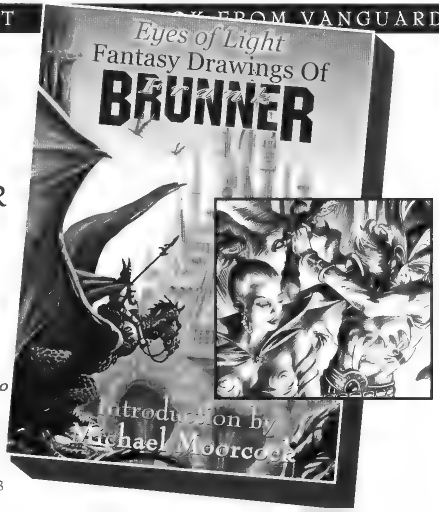

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After a sojourn from these pages, during which time the operation moved into partnership in a new central London location, it's great to be back.

Given the break, it's probably an ideal opportunity to recap the last six months or so in the British market, a six months that has seen a strong flow of business. This is due almost exclusively to the presence of our heroes on the silver screen, allied to a reasonably strong economy when compared to other countries.

In specific terms, *Spideys* continue to come in and go out, with barely a moment to catch their breath in the boxes. *Daredevil* sold like hot cakes for a time there, but has now slowed down to something slightly about previous sales levels. *Hulks* are still hot, hot, hot with anything sub #200 flying out of the door (although we still can't get rid of *TTAs* for love nor money!) and *X-Men* remain the X-Men, the strongest seller of the last 20 years without an end in sight.

Key books from these titles remain in demand in high grade, with *Hulk* #181 attracting the most enquiries. *Giant-Size X-Men* #1 is somewhat slow, but *X-Men* #94 remains a strong seller. *Hulk* #102 flies at *Guide* x1.5 and the *Hulk Annual* #1 (and if you're a *Wizard* reader, you can't convince me that *Spidey* #50 has a better cover than *this* little puppy) never, ever hangs around more than a few days. We took delivery of our latest copy only last week, a lovely CGC-graded VF+, and managed to get it processed and labelled for the London show on Sunday. The thing was gone by 3:00 PM, having attracted many oohs and ahhs before someone finally slapped the cash down.

And having mentioned CGC in passing, I might as well report that CGC's contribution to the strong UK market remains no more than a small blip on the radar. We carry more CGC stock than any other UK dealer, but have no more than a handful of clients who regularly buy CGC books. We have many customers who refuse to buy the things on principle and a number who will take them if there really isn't another option, but there are certainly no true fans of slabbed items. There are numerous reasons offered for this—no belief that the service is necessary, distrust of the grading standards, unwillingness to pay any sort of premium, reluctance to buy something that cannot be fully inspected before purchase—but at some point, the British buying public will have to accept that the service is here to stay and, more importantly, as more and more books are graded and encased, they will have to start buying them if they wish to get their hands on certain books. Let's face facts—the more copies of a certain issue that are slabbed, the fewer there are unslabbed and that means that at some point in the future, CGC books may be the *only* realistic option to obtain specific high-grade key issues.

The Marvel film glut has resulted in previously slow DC sales slowing further still. High-grade items shift, but at a ratio of something like 1 to 3 compared to Marvel. Low- and mid-grade items move fairly quickly through the store with preferred titles being *Justice League*, *Batman*, *Detective*, Adams *Green Lanterns* and keys/minor keys from other titles. DCs don't get any easier to find in high grade, and at some point in the future, people are going to realize this and the demand will outstrip supply. For the time being, though, Marvel remains the buzzword.

We managed to come across a nice little source of super high-grade Bronze Age Marvels, *Hulks*, *Spideys*, *FFs* and the early '70s horror titles being particularly well represented in the batch of 300 or so books. These were absolute beauties, with many grading out at NM- and NM. I'd give you even more specific detail if I could, but I can't. Because they're gone. Sold. Like *that*.

I've also recently turned up a number of early *TTAs* for a customer who has been on the lookout for them for some time now. It's like British transport—you wait half an hour for a bus to come along, then you get three at once.

Anyway, these bad boys are tough, tough, tough to find in grade but I got hold of a #37 in CGC 9.2, a #39 in 9.0 and a #40 in 9.2. These shifted at *Guide* x1.5 with no resistance at all, leaving me with a bit of profit in hand, and a very satisfied customer.

Until next time, I'll leave you with the **scores** on the doors:

Amazing Spider-Man #120 NM $120; *Daredevil* #1 VF+ (CGC) $3750, #5 NM $300; *Defenders* #1 VF+ $75; *Fantastic Four* #4 FN/VF $1200; *X-Men* #94 VF+ $720.

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With the release of the new annual *Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide*, many discovered our website for the first time and we had a flurry of Want Lists. Older Archie and Harvey comics have really heated up in sales.

The single most requested Archie title has consistently been *Betty and Veronica* right from 1950-1987 and also the 1987 to present series. Issues 310-333 are the most requested and are getting very difficult to find. This is right in the low print run era that spawned *Cheryl Blossom*. *B&V* #3-5 have Betty with a ponytail and art that looks like Dan DeCarlo, thus I think the *Guide* listing might be incorrect. All 1950's Archie character title issues are fast sellers and are *not* possible for dealers to restock on eBay, as over-graded copies typically sell well over *Guide* in FN or lower grades. We have had to restock the hard way, by

buying from other dealers and paying high *Guide* percentages. *Katy Keene* has come out of hibernation and is again selling well. In fact, many who have completed their *Katy Keene* sets now want the backup stories in *B&V*, *Laugh*, *Wilbur*, *Archie* and *Pep*. Everything with Dan DeCarlo art sells well, Archie or not. Most buyers of pre-1980 issues prefer GD to FN range copies. But we have many recent requests for 1960s-1980s issues in VF or better. This is no easy task on most pre-1980 issues, as most were well read by the general public and not in the hands of collectors through all these years.

Richie Rich titles have remained steady good sellers, but *Poor Little Rich Boy* #1-50 and all 1960s *Giants* are hot and bringing well over *Guide*. By far the most requested Harvey character in the last six months has been anything with Hot Stuff. Everything is selling in all grades, from any year. Also selling well are *Spooky*, *Little Dot*, *Playful Little Audrey*, *Wendy* and *Blondie*.

Sad Sack has posted good sales too. Buyers are mainly looking for VG average, GD-FN range affordable copies and these remain low and a bargain, by *Guide* prices. The low *Guide* values make them difficult to restock and not tempting for collectors to part with. Thus, we have been forced to pay higher prices to restock these too.

The Canadian "Whites" of the 1941-1946 era remain very hot and we found and instantly sold about 25 issues in GD/VG thru FN/VF for between $60 to $125 each. *Grand Slam Three Aces* had color near the end of the run.

Squadron Supreme: Death of a Universe (Marvel Graphic Novel), for reasons unknown, has been one of the most requested Marvels of the 1980s. We sold about eight copies in the last three months, are now out and having a hard time restocking. Many Marvel magazines of the 1970s are seeing increased demand, but especially the oddball and horror titles. *Deadly Hands of Kung Fu Magazine*, the main Bruce Lee issues, #14, 17 and especially #28, are all red hot comics to watch.

One of the most overlooked and fastest growing areas in comic collecting is cartoon mass market paperbacks and trade paperbacks too. Once we listed our big selection on our website, many buyers found us and many elusive issues. As most were sold to the general public and not held by collectors, most would be surprised to see how many of these are now scarce to even rare.

Peanuts paperbacks remain common and low valued, but the titles first issued in 1985-1990 era had low print runs and often retail between $8-$20 each. Already scarce and getting expensive in high grades is the *Peanuts Parade* (1970s to late 1980s) trade paperback series #1-29 with VF copies starting at $35 range for #1-10, #11-20 at $40-$50 each and #21-27 at $60 and up. The rare #28 and #29 sell at well over $100 each in high grade, if you can find them at all.

These are paperback series that many fans are now trying to complete: *Addams Family*, *Andy Capp*, *Archie*, *BC*, *Beetle Bailey*, *Broomhilda*, *Berenstains* (Pre-Bears), *Blondie*, *Pocket Classics*, *Dennis the Menace*, *Hagar*, *Luann*, *Tiger*, *Tumbleweeds*, *Vampirella*, *Wizard of Id* and many more. There is a general rule of thumb: Older issues had high print runs, are common and often only sell for $3-$6 in the VG-FN range; later and last issues in the various series have small print runs, are scarce and often bring $10-$20 in FN or better

Wrestling magazines remain one of our top sellers for over six months solid, but our inventory of 1955-1975 issues continues to shrink and we cannot find a good source to restock. These remain much more collectible than many think.

The CGC slowdown has subsided and we again sold a lot of items at good prices. We had to keep many listed on our website and off eBay to achieve good results on many items. We also managed to sell a bunch of modern 1975-1985 era items in 9.6 and 9.8 grades at good prices, after a definite lull in the last quarter. Buyers realize that 1974 and older are quite scarce in these grades and many just cannot afford them, thus the swing back to modern.

Everything published by ACG has seen significant increased demand. The superhero issues remain the stable good selling issues. But all the horror, love and humor issues have found new buyers. I speculate that fans now see these as undervalued. Skywald B&W mags have been hot for two years now, but the square bound color comics are now in demand too. *The Heap* is the best seller, but the westerns are now consistent sellers too. All Treasury-sized comics are on the rise in demand. Previous buyers were buying special artist and favorite character issues, but recent buyers are now filling in their runs, especially on Marvel Treasury, Limited Collectors Edition and All-New Collectors edition. The scarcest issues remain *Christmas & Archie*, *Rudolph* (1972), and *Golden Picture Story Book*. We even sold a couple nice sets and some singles of the six-issue *Walt Disney Paint Book* series (1975).

Samples of recent **Harvey title sales**: *Casper the Friendly Ghost* #10 (6/1953, scarce, 1st App Spooky) FA/GD $24; *Hot Stuff, the Little Devil* (10/1957 thru 1/1991) #5 VG $32, #24 VG/FN $12, #25 VF $33, #28 FN $16, #36 GD $6, #37 GD/VG $8, #38 FN $16, #40 GD $6, #41 FN/VF $18, #42 VG $8, #43 VG $8, #46 VG $8, #47 VG/FN $10, #48 VG $8, #50 VG+ $10, #177 (scarcer last issue) VF $9; *Spooky* (11/1955-9/1980) #1 FA/G $39, #2 GD/VG $35, #3 VG $29, #4 GD $16, #5 GD/VG $22, #6 GD $16, #7 FA/GD $12, #8 GD/VG $22, #9 GD/VG $22, #10 FA/GD $12, #11 GD $10, #12 VG+ $21, #15 VG/FN $23, #19 FN $25, #20 GD $10, #26 VG $12, #27 FN $18, #28 VG+ $15, #29 GD $7, #30 VG $12, #35 VG/FN $16, #40 FN/VF $25, #51 (1/1961) FN/VF $20, #52 FN $15, #58 FN $15, #59 FN $15.

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Greetings from the Garden State! Sales have been strong at our shows this past month. But even better news is that every one of our shows has new faces at it! While some are seasoned collectors just discovering us, many are new to the hobby. Roughly 80% of our customers are males

ranging from their mid-teens to retirement age; about 10% are female, mostly college-aged; and the remaining 10% are preteen or low teen children. From conversations with our first-timers, it seems that many thirty-somethings are rediscovering comics, and many teens are discovering them for the first time. Obviously, the younger collectors are the ones we need for our hobby and the medium itself to continue for future generations.

Some of the very youngest collectors are the most interesting (and the ones who make you remember why you fell in love with comics in the first place). In some cases, the children are following in their parent's footsteps. One of our regulars is the pastor of a local Presbyterian church (who frequently references comics in his sermons). He shared his collection with his two young daughters, and then started bringing them to the shows a few months ago. Now they're ardent Catwoman and Wonder Woman collectors! Another regular is a seasoned collector and a graphic artist. He started bringing his six-year-old daughter to the shows about a year ago, just to give his wife a bit of a break on Sundays. We'd all sell him a few low-end funny books with characters she recognized to keep her occupied while dad shopped and chatted. Last month, I encouraged him to pick up a low grade *Shazam Limited Collectors' Edition* for her. She loved it, and now she can't get enough of Captain Marvel! Another dad who had no interest in comics himself has been bringing his ten-year-old son to the shows to encourage his reading. The young man had developed an interest in the Kyle Rayner Green Lantern. I had a Silver Age *GL* that I had paid very little for and offered it to him for a fraction of *Guide*. Well, surprise, surprise, he now wants to know all there is to know about the Silver Age, Golden Age, Bronze Age and Modern GL!

Now, what's the point of all this rambling? It's that there is *something* about comics that is naturally appealing to kids! Sure, we all blame the publishers for high cover prices, and inaccessible storylines (Marvel's "what has come before" page is welcome, and long overdue), but many of *us* are boxing our hobby into a corner with our "boys club" stores and high-end auctions. We *need* to get comics back into children's hands!

Now, on to the data! Our dealers report strong overall sales on Marvel and DC Silver Age in VF or better, pretty much at *Guide*. *Amazing Spider-Man* (SA to present), *Incredible Hulk* (SA to present), *Uncanny X-Men* (SA to present), *Batman* (Neal Adams and Jim Lee issues), *Miracleman*, *Ultimate Spider-Man*, *Ultimate X-men*, *Ultimates*, *Fables*, *Y the Last Man*, and *JSA* are among the strongest selling titles. The single most requested comics are *Incredible Hulk* #102 and *Incredible Hulk Special* #1 (with that great Steranko cover). The one-two punch of Bruce Jone's talent and buzz for the movie is giving what has generally been a "one-note" book (most of Peter David's run excepted) quite a push!

Some **sales of note**:

Platinum Age: *Charlie Chaplin* #317 "Up In The Air" GD $150; *Life of Thomas A. Edison in Word and Picture* VG+ $125; *Skippy* (1929 Grossett & Dunlap) FN $50; *Tarzan of the Apes to Color* GD- $300.

Golden and Atom Age: *Adventures of Rex the Wonder Dog* #13 VG/FN $53; *Animal Comics* #24 VF- $35; *Batman* #42 (CGC 4.0) VG $215; *Detective* #200 VG+ $105; *Funny Stuff* #24 FN $26, #32 VF- $50; *Goofy* #34 FN/VF $30; *Jumbo* #128 GD+ $36; 1943 Tabloid-sized Sunday Comic Section (*Superman* front page, Hogarth *Tarzan* interior) VG $25; 20 Assorted Atlas and Hillman pre-Code War and Western avg VG at *Guide*.

Silver Age: *Adventure* #267 (2nd LSH) VG $170; *Amazing Spider-Man* #96 NM- $225, #98 (CGC 9.2) NM- $190; *Detective* various issues #275-300 Avg FN *Guide*; *Metal Men* #6 VG $12, #7 VG $12, #10 FN #18; *Hot Stuff* #36 VG- $20; *Rolling Stone Magazine* #91 (Hulk cover, Marvel article) FN $25; *Showcase* #45 VG+ $40, #69 FN/VF $30; *Tales of Suspense* #39 (CGC 3.5 1st Iron Man) VG- $550; *Uncanny X-Men* #18 FN+ $90, #24 VF/NM $80, #35 VF $120.

Bronze Age to Modern: *Amazing Spider-Man* #36 (CGC 9.8 the start of Marvel's capitalizing on 9/11) NM/MT $85; *Bishop the Last X-Man* (Complete run #1-16) NM $40; *Daredevil* #181 NM- $15 (Huge dip on this issue post-movie); *G.I. Joe* #151 VF/NM $28; *Micronauts* (1st series) complete run NM $60; *New Teen Titans* (both 1980s runs); *New Titans* and *Tales of the Teen Titans* (complete sets with a handful of higher numbers missing) Avg NM $300 for all; *Uncanny X-Men* #121 (CGC 9.0) VF/NM $65, #137 NM $38; *Wolverine mini series* #1 VF $15; *Wonder Woman* 35 issue lot of Bronze Age to early Modern between issues #200-300 Avg VF+ $60.

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The on-line auction houses drive prices up and eBay drives them down. Sometimes the two systems work in tandem and drive prices up. Together, they work to keep the prices from going in reverse through reserves and high minimum bids. At the store level, almost everything sells at some level of price reduction. Even new comics are discounted as an offering to subscribers.

Many sales are governed by the nature of financial investment. Figure out which comic is worth something and is going to increase in value over time. Recently I had a conversation with an investment analyst. He said that the mixed success of today's market has driven more investors into buying rather than storing money. The two best investments, according to general investment knowledge, are gold and particular collectibles, respectively. His opinion was that comics were near the top for wise collectible investments. Of course, that only covers a small quantity of the comics ever produced.

Unfortunately, the happy days of the 1990s speculator market did their damage and there are investors unwilling to return to our market. The crass, quantity-driven new comic buying-for-resale mentality nearly ruined the vitality of comic book sale, both for new and used. New comic buyers now relegate their purchases for investment to a few copies of their

favorites, including the reduced, variant cover market. Companies like CrossGen prove that the content of the comic book is more important than buying a comic for resale.

The collapse of the speculator market had a secondary side effect—the surge in bargain boxes at stores and comic conventions nationwide. Suddenly, we find ourselves selling recent back-issue comic books for less than cover price to customers on a daily basis. Conversely, we are constantly educating people that want to wholesale their collections to us that the value of their comics may not be what they think. Comic book publications that publish comic book values tend to be a one-way market. Values go up automatically, but rarely go down. Certain price guides address decreased customer desire for certain recent comics, but they do not explain the market dynamics of why this happens. Meanwhile our store, like many others, is bombarded by customer questions regarding true market value on their collections and future predictions about the value of new comics purchased off the racks.

To attend to the reality of comic books as a source of income, the comics that attained legendary status as collectibles, the *Spider-Man* #1s and the *Hulk* #181s, etc., are still valuable. Maybe even more so than before. As for the new comics that are produced and sold each month who knows? Will anything produced now go the distance? Remember *Spawn*, *Evil Ernie* and *Battle Chasers*? My answer to that question is the value of the material presented to us each month is in the eyes of the beholder. Enjoy it.

Golden Age sales: *I Love Lucy* #1 FN $180, #3 FN+ $80; *Legend of Daniel Boone* #1 VG/F $150; *Tomahawk* #11 VG+ $50; *Weird Fantasy* #15 FN $90.

Silver Age sales: *All-American Men Of War* #46 F/VF $75; *Amazing Spider-Man* #13 VG $126, #27 FN+ $125, #40 FN $90, #78 VF $38; *Avengers* #3 FN- $110, #14 VF+ $150, #53 CGC 9.2 $89; *Brave and the Bold* #41 F/VF $75; *Daredevil* #17 F/VF $50; *Doctor Solar* #1 VF- $125; *Fantastic Four* #49 CGC 8.5 VF+ $275; *Flash* #132 F/VF $56; *Green Lantern* #4 VG+ $70, #40 CGC 9.0 VF/NM $355; *Iron Man* #14 VF $29; *Showcase* #60 F/VF $150; *Superman Annual* #1 VG $66; *Wonder Woman* #159 CGC 9.2 $158; *X-Men* #105 F/VF $28.

Bronze Age sales: *Amazing Spider-Man* #300 VF/NM $60; *Daredevil* #168 CGC 8.5 VF+ $150; *Incredible Hulk* #181 VF (restored) $401; *Invaders* #1 NM $40; *Showcase* #88 NM $22.

One last **FYI**: For many of us, *It Rhymes With Lust* is one of the "Holy Grails" of romance comics. There *is* at least one high-grade copy in existence! In 1985 I purchased an *unread* NM copy from a used bookstore for $2 and resold it two days later for $150. Regardless of all the "population reports" and estimates of "known" copies, there are private collections out there that are *massive*, but collected quietly. (The fellow that bought it from me completed a run of GA *Captain America* over ten years ago, and has a high-grade #1 that is totally "off-the-radar").

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Back-issues are back! So far in 2003 the sale of older comics is the strongest I've seen in years. There are a number of factors combining to create this resurgence in the market. The high profile of movies properties like the Hulk, League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, Matrix, and the X-Men has rekindled the interest in a lot of the older collectors—who seem to have trouble relating to the current versions of their favorite characters. Then there is the matter of the cover price of modern comics being higher than the collector's prices of most Bronze Age comics.

Bronze Age is getting hotter by the week. We sold 150 mid-range *Richie Rich* from the late '70s to one person this week. The biggest **Bronze Age dollar sales** are *X-Men* #94 GD $60, #131 Fine- $12, #132 NM $19, #248 NM $24.75, Giant-Size X-Men #1 VG $110.

But the Silver Age and Golden Age are by no mean being overlooked.

Recent **Golden Age sales** include *Adventure Comics* #180 GD+ $47; *All-American Comics* #82 in VG+ for $135; *Captain Marvel* #52 VG+ 31; *Cisco Kid* (1st app. 1944) VG+ $42; *Flash Comics* #21 VG+ $180; *Superman* #79 VG- $63.75; *Whiz Comics* #11 VG+ $146.50, #66 VG+ $45. We also sold a group of Fiction House comics in low grade that consisted of *Jumbo* and *Jungle* comics.

Like the higher dollar Bronze Age sales, **Silver Age sales** reflect the movie market. Selling better now than last year when it was in theaters is *Amazing Spider-Man* #4 G- $110, #19 VG $64, #33 VG+ $24, #40 (1st Origin Green Goblin) GD- $2400, #56 VG $19, #57 VG $18.75, #90 (Death of Gwen Stacy's father) VG+ $19.75; *Spectacular Spider-Man* #1 VF+ $35; *Hulk* #103 VG+ $19, #109 VG $11, #111 VG $12, #180 GD $30; *Tales to Astonish* (featuring The Hulk) #101 VF+ $29.75; *X-Men* #9 FN $95, #15 VG+ $65, #21 VF $55.

But not all Silver Age sales have been movie related. Patriotism has been just as hot as movie properties: *All-American Men of War* #66 GD+ $26; *Blackhawk* #128 GD $11, #160 FN $20; *Classics Illustrated* #68 (Freedom's Cause - 1st Printing) $55.

Ironically, the trend of increased demand started back in February with the strongest single day in back-issue sales this year. On the Saturday of the space shuttle disaster, we sold more back issues in one day than we average for a month. I've always speculated that when people are not happy with reality, the escapism of comics is great medicine.

Another factor in the resurgence of interest in comics may be thanks to the proliferation of computer use in our society. As staring at a computer screen becomes more of an integral part of daily life, the need to escape from routine grows.

When a person needs some brain fun—comics are the answer.

Ron Capitini/Bruce Ellsworth
Classic Cool Collectibles
972-294-1127

Summer may be hot, but Bronze Age comics in VF or better are hotter. We can-

not keep in stock any 20-cent issue, key word being 20-cents. There is something about double dime issues—they are flying out of bin boxes and off the net, making them in short supply. *Avengers* #99 to #120 forget about it, *Fantastic Four* #100 to #150, *Spider-Man* nowhere to be found! All the Marvel (insert title here) issues are being grabbed up showing little slow down. The Bronze Age *X-Men* reprint issues 72 to 83 are selling faster than their Silver Age orginals. Even jumbo size double dime DC is selling at a brisk pace; *Batman*, *Superman* and *Wonder Woman* leading the way. Strong sales at *Gude* or better!

No cure for the summer time blues? Try something different. Underground comix may be the fix. Selling online and at conventions faster than one can keep in stock! The secret is out. The art is fresh even though it's 40 years old, the stories are on the edge funny with an against the grain attitude—and, first and foremost, the books are scarce in high grade, with first printings impossible to find. The works of Crumb, Rick Griffin, S. Clay Wilson and Gilbert Shelton are finding new light and room in every new comic box. It seems as Silver Age collections are being filled the new hunt is on, and this time Underground independent comics from the early '60s and '70s are the target, not from thought police, right wingers or Bible thumpers, but instead by old school collectors who need to keep collecting from a time they are most fond of.

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Wonder Con once again has come and gone. Many months had passed before actually finding out when and where the show was happening. After finding out, concerns were raised by many that changing the venue from Oakland to San Francisco might alienate the crowd that Oakland had established. I personally was pleasantly surprised by how smoothly things were handled. One is always a bit suspect when being moved to a new location. Unseen snags can present a potential minefield of problems. Mind you, I really liked what Oakland had to offer, especially the brew pub, sushi bar and exceptional Le Cheval restaurant, all within a block of the former show sight.

Let me just say now that the Moscone Center gets a big thumbs up from me. The amount of wonderful hotels and restaurants in the city of San Francisco made this such a pleasurable experience. A vacation while on vacation in my opinion. Most of the dealers I spoke with were more than satisfied with the easy load-in and set-up once you arrived at the facility and agreed with my opinion that it was a great place for a convention. The place was actually too huge. The number of dealers that showed up could barely fill up about a third of the space.

The Pittsburgh-Con happening the same weekend definitely affected the amount of mid-west and east coast dealers showing up. One of the things that sticks out more obviously in my mind is the amount of the smaller mom-and-pop type dealers who have been priced out of attending the bigger shows these days. I feel that this is a shame, but do not blame any promoters or facility organizers, just simple economics.

Better convention sites cost more, hotels cost more and product costs more. And one other big reason they don't show up—eBay. For the ex-dealers who don't have enough big ticket items to make it worth putting out a couple of thousand bucks minimum just to cover basic set-up and hotel costs, one might as well just come talk shop and mingle. The attendance seemed high, and there was good energy in the room all weekend.

I enjoyed many return customers over the course of the show. I sold a wide variety of books in all grades from Golden Age to Bronze. Marvels, DCs, Timelys. Quality, Archie, Harvey, Fiction House, ECs, Charlton, Dells, Atlas, etc., etc., etc.

I look forward to the show next year and hope it stays where it is.

A few **sales**: *Hulk* #2 VG/FN $450, #4 VG $225, #5 VG/FN $275, #6 VG/FN $350; *ASM* #13 VG/FN $175, #14 VF $1100; *Green Lantern* #7 (Gold) CGC VF- $900; *Iron Man* #1 VF/NM $325; *Human Torch* #32 GD $125; *Marvel Mystery* #65 GD $200, #71 GD $200; *Flash* #5 FN/GD $300; *Daring Mystery* #2 FR/GD $300; *Phantom Lady* (Ajax) #2 VG/FN $275, (Ajax) #5 VG/FN $275; *All-American* #40 VG $325.

A short box of misc *Richie Rich* titles from the '70s and '80s in VG/FN condition $125; Misc box of Dell funny animal and assorted titles in varying grades $450 (plus a couple of martinis). Lots and lots of other $1, $3, $5 and ten-dollar books.

Al Stoltz
1329 Superior Street
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Just back from the Pittsburgh Comic Convention and I have to admit I am a bit puzzled. The show was managed and organized by the Georges with perfect detail as usual. A decent selection of product and artists spread around the large convention floor. The only problem was from the beginning—a definite drop in attendance over the three days of the show. Where have the customers gone? I did an informal poll among some dealers at the show and the answers were mixed. It was blamed on SARS, bad economy or that Wonder Con and a Horror Show were also the same weekend. Whatever unknown event that caused fewer box diggers to swarm by the booths full of comics is beyond my understanding.

The customers who did wander into my booth were serious about the books they wanted to purchase. We sold a few early high grade *Spider-Mans* to a dealer. Another customer purchased three early nice *All-Flash Comics* in one fell swoop to fill out his want list. A GD/VG grade *Hulk* #181 went to a lucky buyer who just wanted to fill that spot in his *Hulk* collection without emptying his checkbook completely. A *Spider-Man* #5 in FN- and a *Spider-Man* #14 in F-/VF went to another serious collector. Lots of comics in the under $20 range were also of appeal to the crowd this year. It turned out to be a decent year and money was made on the venture, but loftier profits were not reached due to a drop in the number of potential customers coming to the show.

The Charity Auction was as good as ever and my friend Lou bid like a crazy man on two original art pieces and won, a nice full color Dormam painting among the winnings. The Annual Jar-Jar bid and torture doll was won by a few and lost parts every time he was bought, I am so glad this Star Wars Character can bring such joy to adult bidders.

Ebay has been very good lately and we

have been able to sell many of the lots we have posted. I am sure the usual summertime slow down is on its way, but then we post far less due to all the traveling to and from shows. It seems that Byrne *X-Men*, however, do terrible for us and never seem to get any bids. Always hoping that the new movie would pump the sales up on these issues, but it seems not to be.

A cool purchase worth mentioning here is a copy of *Kid Colt Outlaw Album* that we were lucky enough to pick up. I have been looking for a copy of this book for over 20 years and could not believe I finally found one. A very rare Atlas that is mentioned in the Gerber books and listed in the *Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide*. I plan to write up something about it and offer it up to either *CBM* or *CBG* for all to enjoy.

Opinions expressed in CBM *"Market Reports" are solely those of the individual dealers and collectors who contribute them. Prices vary by location, date of transaction and other factors.*

Comic Books Produced by Malcolm Ater's Commercial Comics Company

(All scripts by Malcolm Ater)

Political Comics
Average print runs were 700,000
7 x 10, 16 pages

•Truman for President 1948. First political comic.
•The Story of Al Loveland, Candidate for the US Senate
•Scott Lucas, the Nation's Number One Senator
•The Story of Elpidio Quirino (for President of the Philippines) Published in English, Tagalog, Cebuano, Ilocono and Ilongo
•Escuela de Traidores Spanish language anti-communist, rare. Not intended for USA distribution. Possibly a CIA or USIA book.

5 x 7, 16 pages

•Alabama Needs "The Little Judge" George Wallace for the Big Job
•J Miliard Tawes for Governor Maryland.
•Re Elect America's Number 1 Senator, Paul H Douglas Illinois.
•Let's Keep Alford in Action in Arkansas Pro-segregation.
•Robert B Meyner Unusual in that it names opponents and their connections to organized crime, murder scenes, etc.
•Alabama Needs John Patterson for Governor Pro-segregation.
•Patterson for Alabama Pro-segregation.
•Let's Get Things Done for Kansas, Elect Robert Ellsworth to the U S Senate
•Governor Dennis J Roberts, the Man Who's Done the Most for Rhode Island
•The Truth on Hume, At Last! The True Story on the Democratic Candidate for Governor
•It's Time for Bryant Florida, pro-segregation.
•It's Time for Bagwell Michigan, anti-segregation.
•A Man Named Stevenson Democratic Presidential, 1952.
•Louisiana Needs Chep Morrison Pro-segregation.
•You'll Be the Winner with William Winter Pro-segregation, anti-beatnik and goon, shows anti-war protestors, late 1960s(?).
•The Man Who Beat Hoffa, Des Berry Texas.
•Wayne Morse, the Man
•Elect Robert F Ellsworth to the US Congress
•A Man of Action, Elect Maurice "Footsie" Britt Lt Governor Louisiana.
•For One United Sunshine State, Elect Bud Dickinson Governor Florida.
•Elect David Clark, Democratic Candidate for Congress Washington, DC.
•El Gobernador Que Se Ocupa Richard Hughes for Governor of New Jersey, Spanish version.

In addition there are references in company files to comics for the following candidates, but the full titles and format are unknown:
Harrison A Williams, Senator, New Jersey
Robert B Meiner, Governor, New Jersey
Charles P Howell, Senator, New Jersey

Industrial, Educational and Promotional Comics
Average print runs were 1,000,000
7 x 10, 16 pages

•History of Gas, Through the Ages with Miss Flame American Gas Association, 1947. First appearance of Miss Flame.
•Christmas is Coming Commercial Comics, 1948, done as a promotion for the company. Some overstock distributed years later through Toys R Us in Washington, DC, with store stamp.
•Meet the New Post Gazette Sunday Funnies 1949. Announcing the addition of a Sunday comics supplement, with new art by many top cartoonists, including Gould, Montana, Wunder, Siegal and Shuster, Yagar, Messick and others.
•Joe Worker and the Story of Labor Congress of Industrial Organizations, 1948-1950, rare, 48 pages. Stridently left wing, anti-segregation, has KKK scenes, depictions of anti-Catholic lynching, black lynching, underground railroad, etc., and shows racial cooperation as an asset in winning World War II, and portrays racial integration as an essential expression of American freedom.
•America Under Socialism 1948-1950, rare.
•Joe, the Genie of Steel US Steel, 1950.
•Forest Fire First Smokey the Bear, 1950.
•The Return of Joe, the Genie of Steel US Steel, 1951.
•If an A-Bomb Falls US Government, 1951, 8 pages, rare. Designed as a brochure, but only published as a color strip on the front page of the *Washington Post* in July 1951. Only a few hand bound copies of the brochure were made; two copies are believed to exist.
•The Conquest of Hunger National Fertilizer Association, 1951, scarce. Small print run.
•Safe Breaks Save Lives Wagner Electric Corp, 1951 or 1952.
•Jack and Chuck Learn the Hard Way Wagner Electric Corp, 1952 or 1953.
•From Goodwill Industries a Good Life
•The Will to Win Goodwill Industries.
•Happiness and Healing For You Oral Roberts, 1956, slick covers.
•Seeing Washington Commercial Comics, 1956 or 1957. Done for newsstand distribution, print run was 100,000, but with 15,000 copies sold in 10 days, American News Company, the distributor, closed shop. Remaining copies sold to US legislators for distribution to visiting constituents.
•Knowing's Not Enough US Steel, 1956.
•Copper...The Oldest and Newest Metal Copper Development Association, 1959, also in Spanish.
•Dennis the Menace Takes a Poke at Poison US Dept of Agriculture, 1961, with a complete revision in 1981. Eventually 20 million copies of this book were produced.
•It's Best to Know...About Alcohol Alcohol and Drug Addiction Research Foundation of Ontario, 1961.
•New Uses for the Good Earth Mined-Land Conservation Conference, 1962.
•Where There's Smoke American Cancer Society, 1963. There were 24 press runs for a total of 15,300,000 copies. Early runs had back cover ads of non-smoking athletes, including Bobby Richardson and Bill Russel. Athletes were changed in 1972, and none at all in last press runs.
•Where There's Smoke Canadian Cancer Society, 1963. Back cover has Canadian athletes.
•Ii n'Ya Pas De Fumme Canadian Cancer Society, 1963. French version of Where There's Smoke for distribution in Quebec
•Donde Hay Humo American Cancer Society, 1966. Spanish version of Where There's Smoke
•It's Time for Reason, Not Treason Liberty Lobby, 1967, 4 pages. Promoting patriotism during the Viet Nam War, and exposing unscrupulous industrialists trading with our enemy.
•Ladies...Wouldn't it be Better To Know? American Cancer Society, 1969.
•What if They Call Me Chicken? Anti-drug, Kiwanis International, 1970, with a second version with script and art updates in the early 1980s. Both have Jack Sparling art.

[continued on page 80]

Nolan's Notebook

[continued from page 11]

shout, "Hooray for da Skull and Crossbones!" and "T'ree cheers for da Red Dragon!" If this isn't the worst Superboy story ever told, it's pretty close!

Having conveniently noticed a conflagration in the Smallville hills just before the gangs begin to battle, Superboy convinces them to fight the fire instead of each other. The resulting heroics lead to commendations for all from the mayor and Clark's restoration to the good graces of the community. So much for one of the weakest Superboy stories ever.

In contrast, author John Broome's "The Plight of a Nation!" in *All Star* #40 is one of the best and most effective of all Justice Society adventures. It's a complex 36-page tale—complete with a two-page history and explanation of juvenile delinquency—in which members of the Junior Justice Society ultimately help defeat the Junior Crimson Claws, with help from Green Lantern, Wonder Woman and the other JSA members.

For those who want a reading copy, this landmark story was reprinted in *Justice League* #110 (Mar/Apr 1974). The tale is detailed in *The All-Star Companion* edited by Roy Thomas—a wonderfully informative book that every Golden Age fan should have. The story is a good example of why I consider John Broome right up there with the finest writers in comic history. Sure, it's a comic book, but it's written in such a way as to be downright inspiring without being silly.

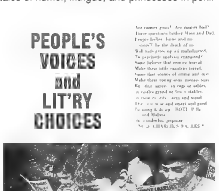
The pop cultural aspect of juvenile delinquency got a huge boost from the mid-1950s birth of rock and roll and the concurrent release of three major films dealing with rebellious youth—*The Wild Ones*, *The Blackboard Jungle* and *Rebel Without a Cause*. I can understand why comic books didn't take on the topic after the advent of the Comics Code, but by that time it had become too serious to be handled with infiltration by comic book heroes.

Weird Words

[continued from page 14]

force for good in the community!" The company lived up to the motto found in their logo—beneath the image of an open book the single word: Integrity.

On the inside front cover of #4 Biro again entertains a group of little locals eager to hear tales of humor, intrigue, and princesses in peril.



An industry ad from the May 1952 **Newsdealer** trumpeted Gleason's aim to create a comic that no one could criticize. Unfortunately the verse has a typo in it!

Greatest Comic Book Ever

[continued from page 15]

in the middle of the table. The arrow informs them telepathically that their prospective recruit, Green Arrow, is now a prisoner! Splitting into groups, the League heads out in search of the sudden menace.

Drawing such a disparate group of heroes is a challenge to any artist. Comparing Mike Sekowsky to anything that has evolved in comics over the past 40 years is unfair and unrealistic. Every member of the League is captured in a style that reflects the time and the demands of the audience. No matter where the story takes the reader, from space to underwater to the peril that Green Lantern faces with Giant Yellow Statues, Sekowsky stays with Gardner Fox all the way. The art serves the story perfectly.

So, 40 years later, the writers of the new Green Arrow series are paying their respects to his long history, and through their skill I am reminded of a great book I haven't read in ages.

Why is *JLA* #4 a great book? Because it was Gardner Fox; because it was Mike Sekowsky; because it started a long-standing, hard working hero on the way to a much-deserved major status; and because his admission into the League allowed it to expand and contract as needed. There are other reasons of course, but the main reason this book has achieved greatness is because it is *fun*.

Marketplace Mail

[continued from page 7]

same ones who do tombstones," he said, "so Steve has that stiff look." Yes, he does look a little grave. The statue, by the way, was still there in 2001, when I had my picture taken with it.

R.C. Harvey

Footnits? I like that word! Here's the photo of the Caniff statue for our readers to see, and thanks for the added information about how it came to exist.

RC

Marvel zombies now 46

Finally! After all these many months, an issue of *CBM* (#99) that is mostly about comic books!

Starting with the marvelous Michelle Nolan, and her Patsy Walker discovery! Who would have thought that issue 73 of her title would now be known as a Marvel Key?

The year I discovered Marvel comics was in the summer of 1965, and Nicholas Caputo reveals to me that I was in the right place at the right time. Thanks for a terrific article, Nicholas!

To top off my delight, Will Murray unearths information about Marvel cover variants! I didn't know about most of these, and I never realized that the cover to *JIM* #58 was the prototype for the *FF* #1 cover! Will wonders never cease? This is what we collectors live for! You've made this *CBM* subscriber very happy. Please keep up the good work!

Tom Stein
Norwalk, CT

Howdy, Pard

Congratulations on issue 98 of *Comic Book Marketplace*. I have been reading the magazine since issue 1 and this was the best issue since you have taken over as editor. The single theme for the issue and the selection of a comics genre that has not been extensively evaluated in the past combined to make the issue both enjoyable and informative. The western genre was a welcome break from the usual super-hero fare.

The columnists did a great job of adding different aspects to the western theme. Michelle Nolan was her usual wealth of information on the DC western titles. R.C. Harvey's column on the western comic strips was a perfect complement to the rest of the articles on western comic books. Scott Shaw jumped right in with his review of *Tomahawk* #103. Even the "Frazetta-Phile," which I don't usually care to see each issue, was excellent and had one of the strongest connections to Frazetta's actual comic work.

The main articles were also excellent. Will Murray's essay on the "Cowhero Age of Comics" was an excellent overview of the subject. Whoever came up with the accompanying graphics for that article should also be complimented. The articles on Dick Ayers and John Severin were certainly expected in a western theme issue of *CBM*, but I as pleasantly surprised by the review of Graham Ingels' western comic art.

Let me note for the record that I am not a western comic collector and know next to nothing about these books. Despite that, or maybe because of my lack of familiarity with the topic, I found this issue to hold the most interest for me. I would be in favor of the occasional *CBM* being devoted to one comic genre of the past. I don't know if this would be financially feasible but you can count on at least one buyer.

David Brillon
Roslyn, NY

Guess he likes it

I've just gotten hold of issue 94, and rather than respond to specific questions I'd just like to give you my overall views and comments (if you can bear with me!) on the direction you're taking my favorite comics magazine.

First of all, my own history as a collector is firmly rooted in (mainly) Silver Age Marvel, but thanks to publications like *CBM* I now have a great appreciation of the great artists (and writers) not only from comics Golden Age but from the strips and pulps as well. *CBM* has long been my top read in the collecting field (I've been a reader since #35), but it's quite hard to track down copies as they come out, so I sometimes end up with a batch of issues (from various mail order sources) at a time (by the way what exactly IS your publishing schedule?). My favorite section of the magazine rather than one particular contributor is "Marketplace Mail," "Inspiration Central" is a nice new addition, and R.C. Harvey is always informative. My preference is for articles and background stories (a la #99) from the Bronze and Silver Ages, but I also greatly appreciate what Russ has tried to do since taking the helm, namely bringing in articles on the great strip artists (really looking forward to a special on one of my favorites—the great Lee Falk) and cartoonists and others working on the periphery of our hobby. I'm also very interested in good quality comics related merchandise, such as statues, busts, signed posters, original artwork, etc., so I find your enhanced coverage of these items a very welcome addition.

I'd love to see a feature on Roy Thomas' and John Buscema's record-breaking run on *Conan*, and maybe on swords and sorcery comics in general.

So to summarize, this is a vote of confidence in the direction Russ has been taking the magazine, i.e., adding new features which are not about comics per se, but about collecting and graphic story-telling in general. Congratulations on your 100th issue and I for one hope to be aboard for the next one hundred!

Jim Dalton
Ireland

20/20 foresight

This is a letter within a letter. I wrote a negatively slanted, yet hopefully constructive letter to you about issue 96 but never sent it. After reading issue 97, I then started a second letter. I loved

almost the whole issue but I still never sent that letter. Well, I am now including the first letter within this letter, unedited with constructive criticism in mind.

Please note that I had not read issue 97 (nor #100) when I wrote this. Number 97 is a great issue that has just the right amount of balance between your love of newspaper artists and the primary focus of *CBM*: great articles about comics, comic collecting, comic artwork and the artists. Keep on that track.

The Original Letter:

I've been trying to accept the direction you've taken for *CBM* and be open minded about the articles but after reading the latest issue, #96, I gotta lay it on the line. I've been a *CBM* fan and subscriber who's had two letters published since the very first edition and I used to wait with baited breath for every issue. Now, I wait in the vain hope that a great issue will appear only to be disappointed with the last four issues. I love and idolize Kubert but even that issue did not have enough diversity. I agree with reader Matthew Clark whose letter I'm surprised you had the nerve to publish in issue 96 You've lost the way. Gary Carter is a tough act to follow and Lisa Carter is an even harder act to follow and, frankly, I think a lot of us were resentful that their names, presence and stewardship of *CBM* were not even mentioned till issue 96. It's as if they never existed. I respect you for slanting things to your own interests but I submit that you may be disenfranchising your core. Believe it or not, I'm trying to be constructive and here's my humble suggestions for how to improve the magazine.

1. Don't waste the color gallery on photos of people. We want beautiful four-color reproductions of comic covers, comic art, etc. I'm not dissing the old guys, I love them but the entire issue focusing on one comic strip artist leaves me cold. How about an article on *comic book* artists who have worked over multiple decades? A number of guys pop into mind—Tuska, Williamson, Meskin, Wood, et al. I love reading about Caniff, too, but not the whole mag. Save the color spread for beautiful, impactful comic covers.

2. More articles on the process of making comics with pictures of artists from the '40s and '50s on the boards, in the trenches. Who ran the color separation house that did the comics, was it World Color? Get the guy who ran that to talk about the *process* of the comics industry in the golden eras. The nuts and bolts are fascinating. And more pictures like the ones of the original comic racks, that was awesome.

3. Bring back the spirit of the old days of *CBM* that even the Carters had abandoned with articles on rarity of specific issues. You could involve CGC surveys and have collectors talk about their search for specific issues. I'm sure the issue of hyping certain issues was a problem when dealers were also columnists and you can avoid that by asking fans to contribute. The hunt is a big part of this hobby.

4. The Caniff cover was inventive but way too busy. You should have just had a huge blow-up of the photo of him sitting with the model for the dragon lady—that cover would have been incredible.

5. Don't ever lose Michelle Nolan. The breadth of her research and knowledge are truly scary.

6. Hire a new art director. Lisa Carter's graphics innovations added tremendously to overall readability of the magazine. The new layouts are leaden, lumpy and low key. You need a dose of *zip*.

7. Longer letter columns. We want to hear what other fans are into.

8. A few artists that have not been given their due by *CBM*—Frank Robbins, Mort Meskin, Tuska (or has he? I'm not sure).

Now back to the current letter (confusing, eh?). Let's cut to the chase; the art direction has improved greatly but your new logo is *horrible*. Stop using it and cut your losses. Logos need to be simple, memorable and classic. The new one is overwrought, busy and confusing. It has too many shapes, too many colors. Did I mention that I didn't like it? The old logo wins hands down. Remember New Coke? I don't either.

Now on to the positive: Issue #99 was a great issue. Great balance of content in the articles, great color sections and a focus on comic related subjects; almost perfect. Number 100 is also good and the layouts are generally greatly improved so overall kudos to M. Kronenberg.

Two more complaints: The cover on #100 was way too busy. Number 99 was better but didn't quite cut it. You need to find a great graphic artist or art director to design your covers. And speaking of covers, the article on HJ Ward was superlative In every way. And the "Pulp Origins of Batman" article was also phenomenal. Sorry to be harsh, but I'm hoping the feedback might help you craft a more perfect *CBM*.

Thanks for carrying the torch. I'm still a fan.

Dan Braun
Nazareth, PA

Dan, I agree with you on several points: We have been using the color section better in the more recent issues, and I agree that it is the place where readers want to see great old comic book covers in color. But what I have been trying to do in the last few issues, like with the H.J. Ward article by Roger Hill and Will Murray's excellent "Pulp Roots of Batman," is to incorporate these color covers into the text of the article instead of having an article, say, on pages 20-25 and the color that pertains to that article in the color section on pages 33-48. It would be a lot easier to fill out the color section with spreads of only comic book covers, four or nine to a page, but I think incorporating them into the articles the way our designer Michael Kronenberg does it is a vastly better way to do it. Readers! Do you agree or not? I also agree that #100's cover was too busy, so we won't do that again for another 100 issues at least.

RC

Wanted: More readers like—

Hey Russ, I really enjoyed the 100th issue of *CBM*. I'll tell you why. The letters column has expanded again, keep it expanded. It's one of my favorite parts of *CBM* to read each month. Let's

have more from Will Murray. Always excellent info. Great articles! Especially the "Pulp Roots of Batman" this month.

I'm also writing to let you know that I agree: we need to broaden our horizons as collectors. I would like to see more articles on pulps and Big Little Books. Let's not forget our Silver and Golden Age comics though, which I see you haven't. I've been following *CBM* since issue #5. It's a must read every month, along with *Alter Ego* and *Comic Book Artist*, etc. Great books also! But, like I say, keep doing what you're doing, even the newspaper strips, because that's where comics originated from in the first place.

One more thing, or two, I would *love* to see more columns on Golden Age books by Jon Berk if possible. How about it Jon? Such as Centaur, Fox, etc. Also how about spotlights on collectors and dealers and their collections, such as: What do they collect? Where do they store them? Pictures, biographies, etc. I think this would be interesting to other collectors. What do you think? Here's to another 100 issues of *CBM*.

Ray Tubic
via e-mail

Thanks, Ray! I have mentioned this before, and will say again that you, the reader, are seeing almost every letter we get. We don't always publish all of the pats-on-the-back we get, but we have published each and every negative letter so we could address the issues in that letter. So, readers, if you want to see more letters here, you'll have to write more of them.

RC

[A complete list of Malcolm Ater's Commercial Comics Co. comic book output, compiled by Tom Christopher, in this issue, page 73]

The Commercial Comics Company

[continued from page 63]

This was the only venture into non-comics publishing he'd done, and it was similar to his 1956 comic book *Visiting Washington*, which was handed out as a travel guide by congressmen and senators to visiting constituents.

In 1971 Commercial Comics had twenty books in print. Ater was president, director and owner of a company making about $100,000 a year. He was the only full time employee, but he employed an additional staff of five artists and eight clerical workers on a freelance basis. At that time he was in the process of reducing his hourly work week from 80 hours to about 30.

During the 1980s he continued to produce comics, one of which was commissioned by the Central Intelligence Agency to be air dropped over the island of Grenada during America's 1983 invasion of that country. The CIA had to distance itself from the project and neither their name nor that of Commercial Comics appears on the book. When Ater was to pick up a check for production costs he was told by his CIA contact to meet at a prearranged place in Washington, DC, and after the meeting he and the agent got into a taxi where he was given a suitcase filled with $35,000 cash.

Also during this time he produced the comic *Madonna on AIDS*, which was commissioned by the rock star and given away at concerts.

Malcolm Ater published comics until his death on May 10, 1992. He was remembered as a dignified man of high standards, who thought it awful, as many of his generation did, when his children started wearing jeans in the 1960s, but he was also remembered as someone who was equally at ease hosting a formal party of politicians or a cookout for professional baseball players.

He should also be recorded as the man who created the political comic book, the first Smokey the Bear comic and one of the most reproduced comics ever. In a 40-year period Malcolm Ater wrote and produced almost 80 comic books that propagandized and informed, and may well have influenced the course of democracy in the United States.

52

by Michelle Nolan

Three Historic Issues Among a Record Total

Depending on your viewpoint and your taste, any one of three comic books issued in 1952 ranks as one of the most important in the history of the field.

It was difficult, indeed, for any comic book to stand out on the overflowing newsstands of 1952, but Dell *Four Color* #386, *Superman* #76 and *Mad* #1 were bellwethers, each among the all-time favorites of readers and collectors alike.

Dell's *Four Color* #386 (Mar), of course, marked the debut of Uncle Scrooge in a comic book of his own with the 32-page classic, "Only a Poor Old Man." It was the beginning of the full flowering of the career of Carl Barks, who combined writing and drawing perhaps better than anyone in history.

DC's *Superman* #76 (May/Jun) contained the first Superman-Batman team-up tale (not counting their limited participation in the Justice Society of America), setting the stage for the most famous partnership in comics history. In retrospect, it seems astounding that it took two years for the super duo to begin their regular team-up series in *World's Finest* #71.

EC's *Mad* #1 (Oct/Nov), of course, not only marked the beginning of satire as a major influence in American pop culture, but was the origin of a magazine with perhaps unparalleled influence on America's youth.

There is a smaller, but no less enthusiastic, cadre of collectors who would vote for the first three war comics published by DC, all in 1952—*Our Army at War* #1 (Aug), *Star Spangled War Stories* #131 (Aug) and *All-American Men of War* #127 (Aug/Sep). They made the battle genre truly a force to be reckoned with.

By now, though, a hardy handful of collectors has doubtless muttered, "What in the world is she babbling about? Everyone knows the real most important comic book from 1952…"

That band of the faithful, of course, would be thinking of *Thunda* #1—the only non-reprint, all-Frank Frazetta comic book ever published!

Bolstered by the full flowering of Atlas Comics, as Martin Goodman's publishing firm became known in the 1950s in between its Timely and Marvel incarnations, comic book exposure reached a peak in 1952 unsurpassed in the history of corporately published newsstand comic books.

Give or take a couple of issues that may or may not exist, 3,161 comic books hit the newsstands with 1952 dates (thanks to noted comics historian Dan Stevenson for the count, and others that follow, all taken from his exhaustively researched year-by-year, issue-by-issue database).

By 1955, the first year of Comics Code Authority symbols and a year after Fredric Wertham's destructive screed *Seduction of the Innocent*, the number dropped to 2,351, even though by that year only a handful of traditional pulp magazines remained to compete for newsstand space. And by 1959, two years after the Atlas implosion and a little more than a decade after the beginning of network television, the count fell to 1,512—less than half the total published only seven years earlier.

Corporate comic book totals would never again even approach 1952. In fact, the record for the first half-century of the "modern" comic—1934-84—was 2,003 issues in 1975.

In 1952, however, the comic book was still king, even though the Golden Age was over and the super-hero occupied only a small fraction of the total comics published. And even though the oldest members of the Baby Boom generation were only six years old and only beginning to read comics.

Romance, crime and horror comics were in full flower in 1952, along with a bonanza of war and funny animal titles. Five corporate publishers produced at least 184 issues and 25 other publishers came out with counts ranging from 133 to 11. Atlas led the way with a whopping 407, followed by Fawcett and Dell with 307 apiece, DC with 295 and Harvey with 184.

Of the five primary publishers, only Fawcett (not counting its convoluted relationship with the Dennis the Menace franchise) was gone by the end of the 1950s, having expired with a few issues dated January 1954. But of the other aforementioned 30 publishers, the only ones still alive in 1959 were Charlton, Archie, ACG, Prize and Gilberton, the latter three with only a minor influence. Several new publishers popped up in the years between 1952 and 1960, but not a single one survived the 1950s.

So even the Baby Boomers, people today in their 50s and 40s, never knew first-hand of the brief period when comic books overwhelmed the newsstands. That,

52 BIG PAGES
SUPERMAN
DOUBLE-FEATURE!
REBIRTH, THE WORLD'S GREATEST DETECTIVE...ALONE FORCED WITH THE MAN OF STEEL...TO BECOME...
THE MIGHTIEST TEAM ON EARTH!
LOIS IN DANGER! SUPERMAN TO THE RESCUE!
NO...THIS IS A JOB FOR BATMAN!

of course, was part of the problem—there simply was not room for 3,161 comic books on the newsstands, even though the mass-market comic book distribution system was not yet showing the financial strains that were to become so increasingly problematic only a few years later.

In fact, many readers probably had considerable difficulty locating all their favorite titles, since an average of nearly ten new comic books were available every day! They weren't placed on the newsstands that often, of course—rather, once or twice a week in most locales—but the competition for exposure was overwhelming.

The trends, however short-lived, were obvious—"Crime" was the first word emblazoned on 17 different comic book titles from 11 different publishers! There were, of course, many other crime types. Meanwhile, "Love" jump-started 14 titles, which still were only a handful of the available romance comics. And during the dawn of the Atomic Age, television and the movies had enough influence that "Space" was how 9 titles began in 1952—seven of them first issues. Ironically, in 1958—the year after the Soviet Union's Sputnik made the word "satellite" mandatory for kindergartners to learn—the only original comic book with "Space" in the title was Charlton's minor-league *Space Adventures* (not counting a few bandit *IW* reprints).

In the minds of some collectors, the Golden Age—or at least that part of the period owned by DC—ended with the demise in 1952 of the anthology format of *Star Spangled Comics* when it bowed out with #130 (Jul), with the final Robin solo story. That monthly title ran 11 years. Likewise, *Blue Bolt Comics*, which began in 1940, became *Blue Bolt Weird* with #111 (Dec 1951). No more super-heroes (or even super-hero reprints, which began a year earlier), no more good-natured Dick Cole sports heroics—just horror stories and more horror stories.

Speaking of horror, DC entered the field—albeit with a maximum of mystery and a minimum of gore—with *House of Mystery* #1 (Dec 1951/Jan 1952) and *Sensation* #107 (Jan 1952), which became a weirdie after the last *Wonder Woman* issue in #106—and became *Sensation Mystery* with #110. DC's *Phantom Stranger* #1 (Aug/Sep 1952) ran only six issues, but packed a much more profound impact when revived at the tag end of the Silver Age.

One of the milestone moments in horror comics also occurred with the publication of *Journey Into Mystery* #1 (Jun 1952) from Atlas, which lasted 82 issues until Marvel's *Thor* hammered his way into the title ten years later.

Another 1952 moment was the appearance of the first issue of *Tweety and Sylvester*, as *Four Color* #406 (Jun 1952), at last giving the befuddled cat and the befuddling canary their due a decade after Tweety Bird first uttered "I tawt I taw a putty tat" in a Warner Brothers cartoon. Sylvester came along in 1947.

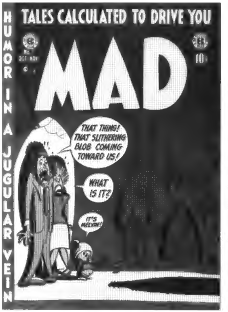
Tweety and Sylvester, a personal favorite, was apparently not popular enough to publish more than quarterly, but their original 37 Dell issues from 1952-62 are nothing less than a riot, and a most fitting companion to many favorite forties and fifties cartoons.

Ironically, the best of the Tweety and Sylvester knockoffs, DC's Flippity and Flop, actually made it into their own book six months earlier, thanks to DC's penchant for post-Golden Age experimentation. *Flippity and Flop* #1 was dated Dec 1951/Jan 1952, the same date as *The Fox and The Crow* #1, which went on to considerably greater comic book notoriety than either of the cat-and-canary chasers.

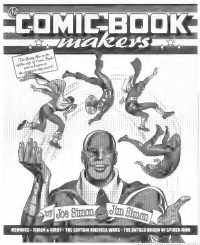
Two other noteworthy comic book debuts in 1952 were *Adventures of Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis* #1 (Jul/Aug) and *Adventures of Rex the Wonder Dog* (Jan/Feb). The two series are now collected with more avid appreciation than they enjoyed during their original runs.

For those who like comic book funk, 1952 featured a classic debut with ACG's *Dizzy Dames* #1 (Sep/Oct). That wacky title, notoriously politically incorrect today, lasted only six issues.

While no one can argue the historical importance of the first issue of *Uncle Scrooge*, three of my absolutely favorite Barks stories also appeared 1952—the marvelously sentimental "A Christmas for Shacktown" in *Donald Duck Four Color* #367 (Jan/Feb), the monumental stamp-collecting epic "The Gilded Man" in *Donald Duck Four Color* #422 (Sep/Oct), and the untitled Donald Duck 10-pager in *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories* #146 (Nov). In the latter story, Donald's disastrous attempts to raise chickens results in the town of Pleasant Valley being renamed Omelet in perhaps the funniest comic book tale of all time.


TALES CALCULATED TO DRIVE YOU
MAD
HUMOR IN A JUGULAR VEIN
THAT THING! THAT SLITHERING BLOB COMING TOWARD US!
WHAT IS IT?
IT'S WEIRD!

Yes, indeed, 1952 was a wonderful year for comics.



The Comic Book Makers, by Joe Simon (with Jim Simon) (Revised edition, 2003: Vanguard Productions, New Jersey) deluxe hardcover in slipcase, hardcover, paperback

This wonderful and eminently readable book is basically the personal memoirs of Joe Simon, of Simon & Kirby fame. It's the story, told in Joe's own words, of his career in comic books, starting with his first job out of high school in 1932 for the Rochester *Journal American*, where he did sports cartoons, then going to New York City at just exactly the right time to get in on the first superhero comic books.

His stories about working for Martin Goodman at Timely (Marvel), the infamous Victor Fox, where he worked with his idol Lou Fine, and where he met and worked with Jack Kirby for the first time, are entertaining and colorful.

If this sounds familiar, it might be because this book was first published in a cheaper and smaller edition in 1990. The new editions by Vanguard are available in three formats: a paperback, a hardcover and a deluxe signed hardcover in slipcase.

Simon's lively text is illustrated profusely with both color and black and white reproductions of comic book pages and covers, including many previously unpublished pieces.

Joe Simon was there when it all started, and he takes us through the superhero years, the travails of the late 1940s, the crime and romance books of the 1950s, and right on up to the present day.

It's an entertaining and educational read, and one I would recommend to all collectors who are interested in the history of comic books.

List of Commercial Comics Produced

[continued from page 73]

•Danny and the Demon Cycle Safety Division of Virginia, slick cover, 1972. Bicycle safety.
•Andy Goes to the Park Andy Capp, National Park Service, 1975.
•Taking a Chance...With No Chance to Win American Cancer Society, 1976.
•Coriendo Un Reisgo Sin Oportunidad De Ganar American Cancer Society, 1976. Spanish version of Taking a Chance
•Think First About Your Unborn Child Rex Morgan, MD, discusses fetal alcohol syndrome.
•So You Want to Stop? You Can! American Cancer Society, 1976, English and Spanish
•Dennis the Menace Coping With Family Stress National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, 1981.
•Grenada Central Intelligence Agency, 1984. Commissioned by the CIA to be airdropped over Grenada during the US invasion. Scarce as none were meant for distribution within the United States.
•AIDS Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
•Madonna on AIDS This is the same book as AIDS, with a Madonna cover.
5 x 7, 16 pages
•How to Get the Most Out of Your NEA Membership National Education Association 1951, 16 pages. Bound into NEA Journal.
•From Ball Game to Ballroom Arthur Murray School of Dancing, 1952.
•The Magic of Vitamins Bexel Vitamins, McKesson & Robbins, 1953.
•The H Bomb and You US Government, 1955, 20 pages, scarce due to low distribution in few cities.
•Freedom or Compulsion US Chamber of Commerce and Ohio Right to Work Committee, 1957, anti-union.
•Naked Force Kansas for the Right to Work, 1958, anti-union.
•Bouncy Bexie Bexel Vitamins, McKesson & Robbins, 1961.
•Oh, My Achin' Back! Michigan State Chiropractic Association, 1963.
•Take Care of Yourself American Cancer Society, 1967, 4 pages. Designed to encourage English speaking women of Spanish descent to take the PAP test.
•Cuidate, Mama American Cancer Society, 1967. Spanish version of Take Care.
•Teenage Booby Trap Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, 1970.
•Beware the Booby Trap US Department of Defense, 1970. Teenage Booby Trap with military cover.

In addition, company records indicate the existence of the following books with unknown formats, subjects and publication dates:

A Safe Start
Keeping Safe Off the Job
A Safe Beauty Shop

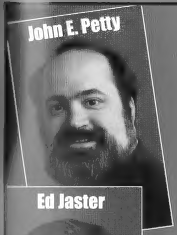
Interview: Russ Heath

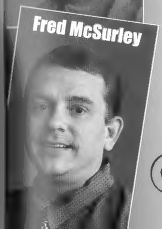
[continued from page 32]

There was earlier, but they were strictly comic book westerns. If you want it done correctly, you go to John, or myself. A couple of years ago, I gave up on trying to catch John on being authentic, when he started using sewing patterns for Civil War uniforms. I can't go there. But anyway, so they called and the offer was good enough, and I was hoping that we'd get enough papers...that [the strip] would make a decent buck. This was in the early 1980s and I felt if I could make $1500 a week on it that would be pretty good. I never thought the Lone Ranger was too cool an idea, you know, running around with the mask and all that. I mean, what motel would let you in at night with a mask on. It doesn't work. But I tried. I made it as realistic as I could and I thought I did a pretty good job.

Ringgenberg: What I've seen of it is great. It's one of the best late era adventure strips that anybody's done.

Heath: Well, I also learned [about reproduction] because they shrink the stuff so much, and I learned from seeing Al Williamson's space strip, *Star Wars*. The lines were so fine that a lot of it dropped out. Even whole characters dropped off the page. You've got to use a bold enough line and...you can't do cross-hatching if it's going to be reduced too much, because it'll turn black. It'll all close up on you. And if you leave too big a space, it'll look like a lattice fence. So, there were lessons I learned in doing it, from when I first started it to when I finished....You get into how to do it after a while. It was a lot of good stuff. That may be some of the only originals I have. I've got five or six dailies of that strip, and when I look back at it I see the Lone Ranger's looking for Tonto, who's missing, and he's going along this stream, and...you can see his reflection in the water, and I thought, "Damn it, nobody was doing that, when I did it." And I was kind of proud of the stuff that I was able [to do], because doing a highly illustrated strip is just murder.





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